

HIS†ORY

From Gathering to Growing Food

The Beginning of Farming

The changes in the climatic conditions in the late Neolithic Age brought about changes in the lives of humans too in the following ways:

- The changes in the environment resulted in changes in plants and animals. These changes were observed by humans.
- Humans began to learn about places where edible plants could be found. They also noticed the way in which seeds led to the germination of new plants.
- Once, people realised this process, they began to look after these plants by watering them and saving them from wild animals. It is in this way that humans became farmers.
- The planting of seed requires watering, weeding and driving animals away. Thus, humans had to stay in one place for a longer period of time.
- The need to store grain and food resulted in the making of large clay pots and baskets. Humans also dug the earth to store grains.
- Humans also noticed that certain animals were timid and they could be tamed by giving them food and shelter.
- Dog was the first animal to be tamed by humans. Later, goats, sheep and cattle were also domesticated. Humans saved these animals from the attacks of other wild animals. In this way, humans became herders.

Domestication is a process in which humans grew plants and looked after animals. The process of domestication began about 12,000 years ago. People selected those plants for domestication which yielded large sized grains and had a strong stalk. **Wheat** and **barley** were some of the earliest plants to be domesticated. Similarly, those animals which were timid and could not harm humans were domesticated. Gradually the domesticated plants and animals became different from the wild plants and animals.



Farming is believed to have started in the late Neolithic Age



Painting showing the domestication of animals in ancient Egypt

Evidences of First Farmers and Herders

The following table shows the places in the Indian sub-continent where evidences of early domestication of plants and animals are discovered. The discovery of animal bones and burnt grains helped scientists to discover these places. Some of these places are:

Grains and Bones	Sites
Wheat, barley, goat, sheep and cattle	Mehrgarh (Pakistan)
Rice and pieces of bones	Koldihwa(Uttar Pradesh)
Rice and cattle	Mahagara(Uttar Pradesh)
Wheat and lentil	Gufkral (Kashmir)
Wheat, lentil, dog, cattle, sheep, goat and buffalo	Burzahom(Kashmir)
Wheat, green gram, barley, buffalo and ox	Chirand (Bihar)
Black gram, millet, cattle, sheep and pig	Paiyampalli(Andhra Pradesh)
Millet, cattle, sheep, pig and goat	Hallur (Andhra Pradesh)

Evidences of Tools, Houses and Pots

Many other evidences like the remains of houses and tools have helped us to identify the places where people lived and the activities they were engaged in.

Tools

- The discovery of various stone tools has helped scientists to differentiate between the various periods of history.
- In the Neolithic period, tools were polished and sharpened so as to have a fine cutting edge. They came to be used for grinding grains.

Pots

- Many decorative and plain earthen pots have been discovered from different places. These pots were used for cooking food such as wheat, rice and lentils.
- Pots were also used for storing food.



Pots were decorated and used to cook food and store grains.

Huts

- People lived in huts or houses. At Burzahom in Kashmir, evidences have been found of pit houses which were dug into the ground with steps leading up to them.
- These pit houses provided shelter to the people against the cold weather.
- Many cooking utensils have been found inside and outside the houses which indicate that people cooked food inside and outside their houses.

Tribes

Many farmers and herders lived together in groups called **tribes**. Following are the main characteristics of the tribes:

- People living in tribes followed occupations such as hunting, gathering and farming.
- Women did agricultural work such as sowing and harvesting.
- Men led a large herd of animals in search of pastures. Men and women both wove baskets, tools and huts.
- The young warriors or old and experienced people came to be regarded as leaders.
- The people of the tribes regarded the forests, water and grasslands as sacred as these gave them food and shelter.

Case Studies

Mehrgarh

- Mehrgarh is one of the earliest sites in the Indian subcontinent where people grew wheat and barley.
- Archaeologists found the bones of sheep and goats in this area which indicates that people herded animals such as sheep and goats.
- Remains of rectangular and square houses have been found in Mehrgarh. Each house had four or more rooms, some of which were used for storing grains.
- Many burial sites have been found here. It is believed that people believed in life after death as in one of the burial sites, a person was buried with goats.

Daojali Hading

- This site is located on the hills near the Brahmaputra Valley, close to the routes leading into China and Myanmar.
- At this site, stone tools including mortars and pestles have been found showing that people here were aware of the process of growing grains.
- Among the tools, a tool made out of jadeite has been found. This stone was perhaps brought from China.
- In Daojali Hading, pottery and tools made out of fossil wood has been found. Fossil wood was the ancient wood which was hardened into stone.

We need to remember, that at this time while some people were becoming farmers and herders, many people were still hunters and gatherers.



Map of the Indian subcontinent showing Mehrgarh, Burzahom and Daojali Hading.