

THE IRON AGE.

THE 'AGES' OF HUMAN HISTORY.

The materials used by early human beings are still useful for us today. As you know, we have learnt about the life of these human beings through the discovery of artefacts used by them. To make it easier to study early human history, historians have divided it into 'ages'. An age is a very long period of time. This table tells you some things about the ages.

Age-Stone Age.

Materials used - Stone, wood, bone, and horn. In the later part, people learnt to make Pottery using clay. Life of the people- Hunting and gathering .Later, farming developed along with animal rearing and trade. Villages and towns grew.

Age-Copper and Bronze Ages.

All the materials used earlier, and also:

- 1) Copper .
- 2) Bronze made by mixing copper with tin .

Life of the people-Variou civilizations began to develop. They had good agriculture and the earliest cities. Cities and civilizations traded amongst themselves to get the goods that the needed.

Age-Iron Age.

The materials used earlier, and also: Iron.

Though early history has been divided in this way, one age did not come to an end neatly before another one started. When people started using bronze, they were also still using stone and copper. Similarly, when people started using iron, they were also still using bronze. The Iron Age was the time in early human history when people began to use tools and weapons made of iron. These different ages did not happen at the same time all over the world. For example, people in Egypt were making bronze articles 4,500 years ago, whereas in China this happened 3,500 years ago. Similarly, the Iron Age happened at different times in different parts of the world. Historians think that the earliest widespread use of iron started about 3,200 years ago or around 1200 BCE in West Asia, in the area that is now Turkey (see your atlas). For a long time, only these people knew how to use iron, but this knowledge gradually spread to other parts of the world. The timeline shows you some important events in human history.

USEFULNESS OF IRON.

Iron was an extremely useful metal for human beings. You will understand this if you look at the differences between bronze and iron. Iron is a much harder metal than copper or bronze so it was better for making tools and weapons.

- 1) Iron is found in many parts of the world, whereas tin, which is used to make bronze, is not as widespread.
- 2) All metals melt when they are heated to a high temperature. Bronze melts at a much lower temperature than iron. Early people were able to melt bronze and pour it into moulds to make weapons or tools. However they could not heat iron enough to make it melt. So it was heated and when it was soft, it was beaten into the tools or weapons that were required. This process made their tools and weapons very strong. Several iron artefacts from early human history have been found. These show that people had learnt to make useful objects, particularly tools and weapons, from this metal. Some of the artefacts that have been found are axes, ploughshares (used to dig fields), sickles (used to harvest crops), nails, swords, spears, arrowheads and pots.

THE CHANGES OF THE IRON AGE.

1) AGRICULTURE.

People used iron axes to clear forests so that they had more land for farming. Iron Ploughshares, fixed to wooden ploughs, could dig deeper and turn the soil better than earlier tools. This helped to grow better crops, so more food could be produced. Iron sickles were better for harvesting (cutting) the ripe crops.

2) BUILDING AND CRAFTS.

Iron helped to improve crafts as well as building activities. Some artefacts that have been found are iron cooking pots and nails.

3) TRADE.

As tools improved, more food and other goods were produced than were actually needed. This is called a surplus (extra). Towns and villages sold their surplus to each other. This is called trade. Trade between different regions increased. With increasing trade, money began to be used. Some early coins were of iron, but later coins were of metals like silver and gold. Coins were also made of a mixture of silver and gold.

4) CITIES AND URBAN CENTERS.

With improved agriculture, everyone did not need to be a farmer. A few people could produce the food that was needed. Many people were free to do other things. Cities and urban centres (areas connected to cities) grew. Some of these were very grand, with magnificent buildings, art, craft and literature. They became the centers for trade as well.

5) WEAPONS AND WARFARE.

Iron was extremely useful in making better weapons like swords, spears and arrowheads. Wooden wheels on war chariots were fitted with iron spokes and rims. This made the chariots faster. People with iron weapons could win battles easily against people who did not know about iron or its uses. Thus iron weapons helped people to gain more territory (area) over which they could rule. Kingdoms became bigger.

CIVILIZATIONS OF THE IRON AGE.

With the growth of cities and urban centres, civilizations developed. Civilization means that a place is highly developed in areas like art, trade, writing, architecture, etc. All civilizations of the ancient world did not exist at the same time. Many civilizations developed before the Iron Age. Two civilizations of the Iron Age were the Greek and the Roman civilizations. The maps show you their locations-both were in areas around the Mediterranean Sea. The discovery and use of iron was an extremely important development in human history. Iron is still extensively used today.

SUMMARY.

- 1) Early human history is divided into long periods of time called 'Ages' based on the materials that people used.
- 2) The various Ages happened at different times in different places.
- 3) The Iron Age is the period when people began to use iron to make tools and weapons.
- 4) Iron is a hard metal and so it was used to make strong weapons and tools.
- 5) The use of iron changed human lives in many ways.
- 6) Two Iron Age civilizations were the Greek and Roman civilizations.
- 7) Very early iron artefacts-beads and a dagger-have been found in Egypt. Analysis has shown that these were made from iron found in meteorites (stones that fall to earth from outer space). Ancient Egyptians called this iron *ba-en-pet* which means 'Stone or Metal from Heaven'.
- 8) The best steel in the Roman civilization was Seric steel from southern India. Trade in this metal was part of Indian trade with Rome.