

UNIT 1

The Discipline of History and Human Evolution

Introduction to History and Prehistory

1. What is History?

History, derived from the Greek word *Istoria*, means "inquiry" or "an account of one's inquiries." It is the study of past human activities and events. Historians are people who study and write about the past based on evidence. History officially began about 5,500 years ago when writing was first developed. Before this period, human activities are studied under prehistory, which is the time before written records existed. Archaeologists and anthropologists use clues from artifacts and remains to understand early human life.

2. The Discipline of History

History involves analyzing human interactions, the growth of civilizations, technological advancements, and humans' relationship with the environment. It is not just about recording events but also interpreting why and how they happened. Historians use facts, which are verifiable pieces of information about the past, to construct narratives and explanations. Distinguishing between fact and opinion is crucial in history. Facts are supported by evidence, while opinions are personal beliefs that cannot always be proven.

3. Importance of History

Studying history helps us understand our past, make sense of the present, and anticipate future developments. It informs us about national and international issues and helps us understand democratic principles and nationalism. History also develops research skills and provides a sense of identity.

4. Historiography and Historical Interpretation

a. Historiography

Historiography is the study of how history is written and understood. The earliest written history comes from China, and ancient Greek historians like Herodotus and Thucydides significantly contributed to historical study. In the 19th century, history became a formal academic discipline, largely due to the work of historians like Leopold Von Ranke. Ethiopian historiography also developed over time, particularly in the 20th century.

b. Historical Interpretation

Historical interpretation involves describing, analyzing, and explaining past events based on sources. Historians strive for objectivity but must navigate personal biases. They use various methods and sources to reconstruct past events accurately.

5. Sources of History

Sources are essential for studying history and are categorized into two main types:

a. Primary Sources: These are original materials from the time under study, such as artifacts, documents, and records. Examples include coins, tools, manuscripts, and photographs.

b. Secondary Sources: These are interpretations or analyses based on primary sources, like books, articles, and biographies. They provide second-hand information and require critical evaluation for accuracy.

6. Dating in History

Historians use dating to place events in time. This involves numerical statements or units such as decades, centuries, and millennia. For instance, the Battle of Adwa occurred on March 1, 1896, and the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam was initiated on April 2, 2011. Dating helps organize events chronologically using calendars, such as the Gregorian, Islamic, or Ethiopian calendars. A timeline visually represents historical events in chronological order.

7. Human Evolution and the Stone Age

a. Evolution of Humans

According to evolution theory, all modern humans belong to the species *Homo sapiens*, which evolved from earlier hominids. The study of early human fossils, especially in Ethiopia, reveals different species:

- *Homo habilis*: The oldest known species, found in Ethiopia.
- *Homo erectus*: Emerged around 2 million years ago, used more advanced tools, and was the first to migrate out of Africa.
- *Homo sapiens*: Modern humans, appeared around 100,000 years ago, with advanced cognitive abilities and cultural development.

Ethiopia is significant for its numerous fossil sites representing these stages of human evolution.

History is the study of past human activities, beginning with written records around 5,500 years ago. Prehistory covers the time before writing, and historians use primary and secondary sources to reconstruct and interpret past events. Dating and timelines help organize and understand

historical events, while the study of human evolution highlights the development of early hominids in Africa.

Theories of Human Evolution and the Stone Age

Theories of Human Evolution

1. Creationist Theory:

- **Concept:** This view suggests that humans and all living things were created by God or a supernatural being.
- **Belief:** It emphasizes a divine origin for human life.

2. Evolutionist Theory:

- **Concept:** Proposed by Charles Darwin, this scientific theory states that all living things, including humans, evolved over time through a natural process called evolution.
- **Process:** Evolution involves gradual changes and variations from earlier forms. It is widely accepted in the scientific community.

Current View: While evolutionist theory is dominant in scientific circles, many people worldwide still believe in the creationist perspective.

The Stone Age

The Stone Age is divided into three main periods, each marked by the development and use of stone tools.

1. Paleolithic Age (Old Stone Age):

- **Timeframe:** Until around 11,000 years ago (circa 9,000 BC).
- **Features:** Early humans made crude stone tools, lived in caves, discovered fire, and began to use language.

2. Mesolithic Age (Middle Stone Age):

- **Timeframe:** From about 9,000 BC to 8,000 BC.
- **Features:** Stone tools became more refined and versatile, representing a transitional period between the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages.

3. Neolithic Age (New Stone Age):

- **Timeframe:** From around 8,000 BC to about 4,000 BC.
- **Features:** Marked by the Neolithic Revolution or Agricultural Revolution, this period saw:
 - **Shift to Agriculture:** Transition from hunting and gathering to farming and domestication of animals.

- **Development:** Creation of permanent settlements, advanced tools (e.g., hoe, wheel), and complex social structures.
- **Impact:** Led to the rise of communities and laid the groundwork for future civilizations.

Archaeological Evidence:

- **Ethiopia:** Early Neolithic sites include Aksum, Lalibela, Chercher, and Metehara, where evidence of early agriculture and pottery has been found.

Emergence of States

Definition of a State:

- **Characteristics:** A state is a politically organized entity with a defined territory, government, sovereignty, and recognition.

Theories on the Emergence of States:

1. **Religious Theory:** Early theocratic states were ruled by priests as religion became central to governance.
2. **Agricultural Theory:** The surplus produced by agriculture led to social stratification and the rise of elites, eventually forming states.
3. **Trade Theory:** Control over trade routes and markets led to the rise of village chiefs who established states.
4. **Conflict Theory:** States emerged from the consolidation of smaller villages under powerful local leaders through conflict or force.

Summary

- **History vs. Prehistory:** History begins with written records, while prehistory covers the time before writing was developed.
- **Historiography:** The study of how historical knowledge is acquired and transmitted.
- **Evolution vs. Creationism:** Two major theories explaining human origins, with evolution being widely accepted in the scientific community.
- **Stone Age:** Divided into Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods, each marked by advancements in tool-making and lifestyle changes.
- **Emergence of States:** Theories include religious, agricultural, trade, and conflict-based explanations.