



Class 9 Social Science – Chapter 4

Notes



Early Humans and Beginning of Civilisation



Textbook: *Understanding Society: India and Beyond – Grade 9, Part 1*



Subject: Social Science – History



Chapter: 4



Academic Session: 2026–27



1. Introduction – Early Human History

Human history goes back much further than the history of kingdoms and empires.

This chapter explores:

- 👤 Who our earliest ancestors were
- 🌍 Where and when humans evolved
- 🍖 What early humans ate
- 🏠 How they lived
- li>• 🔧 How they made and used tools
- 🌾 How agriculture began
- 🏡 How settled communities developed
- 📝 How writing was invented
- 🏛️ How early civilisations developed
- 🌐 How early civilisations interacted with one another

The chapter's four big questions focus on **early human life, communication before writing, archaeology and interactions between early civilisations.**



2. Why Should We Study Early Human History?

Studying early human history helps us understand the long process of **human biological and cultural evolution**.

Biological Evolution

Biological evolution refers to gradual physical and genetic changes through which early human ancestors developed into modern humans, **Homo sapiens**.

Cultural Evolution

Cultural evolution explains how humans adapted to changing:

-  Climate
-  Environment
-  Living conditions
-  Technologies
-  Social conditions

The textbook places this development within the **Quaternary Period**, covering roughly the last 26 lakh years.

3. Who Were Our Human Ancestors?

The earliest human settlements were found in:

-  Africa
-  Asia
-  Europe

Together, these regions are referred to as the **Old World** in the chapter.

Different kinds of human ancestors existed during early human history.

Around **3.3 million years ago**, one of these ancestors made some of the earliest known stone tools.

This development is important because it shows the ability to deliberately make and use tools.

4. Hominins and Tool Making

Early human ancestors who made and used tools are referred to in the chapter as **hominins**.

🔧 Tools helped humans perform tasks that could not be accomplished easily with their hands alone.

The textbook describes tools as “**extra-corporal limbs**” because they acted as extensions of the human body.

Early humans:

1. 🪨 Made tools
2. 🖐️ Used them
3. 🔧 Depended on them for different tasks
4. ♻️ Discarded them when they were no longer useful

Over time, discarded tools became important archaeological evidence.

5. How Do We Know About Early Humans?

We do not have written records for most of early human history.

Therefore, **archaeology** is extremely important.

Archaeology

Archaeologists study remains left behind by people in the past.

They may find:

- 🪨 Stone tools
- 🦴 Bones
- 🏺 Pottery
- 🧱 Structures
- 🔧 Other artefacts

These remains help archaeologists reconstruct how early humans lived.

Archaeologists can also recreate and use similar tools to understand how early humans made and used them.



6. Before Writing and After Writing

More than **99% of human history** falls within the period before the last 5,000 years.

Before Writing

The major sources are:

-  Tools
-  Artefacts
-  Bones
-  Material remains
-  Other archaeological evidence

Dating events and cultures from this period is often approximate.

After Writing

Written records provide information about:

-  Rulers
-  Events
-  Social life
-  Political life
-  Cultural life

Written records can also make the dating of particular events more precise when they mention specific dates.



7. Communication Before Writing

Before writing systems were developed, humans still needed to communicate.

They could communicate through:

-  Speech
-  Gestures
-  Symbols

-  Images
-  Rock art

Archaeological evidence helps us understand some aspects of early communication and symbolic behaviour.

8. Early Human History – Major Periods

Early human history is divided into periods partly according to technological development, agriculture, lifestyle and settlement patterns.

The important periods are:

Paleolithic – Old Stone Age

Features:

-  Hunting and gathering
 -  Simple stone tools
 -  Mobile lifestyle
-

Mesolithic – Middle Stone Age

Features:

-  Use of **microliths**, or very small stone tools
 -  Transitional stage between hunting-gathering and agriculture
-

Neolithic – New Stone Age

Major changes included:

-  Beginning of agriculture
-  Settled life
-  Domestication of animals
-  Polished stone tools

This major transformation is known as the:

Neolithic Revolution

Chalcolithic – Copper and Stone Age

The Chalcolithic period was characterised by:

-  Use of copper
-  Continued use of stone tools
-  Early metallurgy

Metallurgy involves extracting and shaping metals into useful objects.

Bronze Age

The Bronze Age saw:

-  Development of bronze metallurgy
 -  Mixing copper and tin to make bronze
 -  Growth of towns
 -  Expansion of trade
 -  Development of early civilisations
-

Iron Age

The Iron Age was characterised by:

-  Widespread use of iron
 -  Stronger tools
 -  Stronger weapons
 -  Development of more complex societies
-

9. The Neolithic Revolution

The shift from:

 Hunting & gathering



 Agriculture



 Settled communities

was a major turning point in human history.

Important Changes

-  Farming began
-  Animals were domesticated
-  Permanent settlements developed
-  Better stone tools were used
-  Communities became more settled

This is called the **Neolithic Revolution** because it brought major changes in human lifestyle rather than being just a small technological improvement.



10. From Villages to Cities

As agriculture developed, people increasingly settled in one place.

 Farming →  Villages →  Towns →  Cities →  States and Civilisations

Agricultural surplus helped support people engaged in activities other than farming, such as:

-  Craft production
-  Trade
-  Construction
-  Administration

Over time, some cities developed systems of government and became **city-states**.



11. Sindhu–Sarasvatī / Harappan Civilisation

The chapter connects the development of the Harappan civilisation with earlier Neolithic and Chalcolithic developments.

Evidence from regions of:

-  Indus basin
-  Ghaggar-Sarasvatī basin
-  Baluchistan

shows cultural developments before the Mature Harappan phase.

Early Harappan Features

Evidence includes:

-  Pottery traditions
-  Semi-precious stone beads
-  Shell bangles
-  Terracotta objects
-  Copper working
-  Settlement walls
-  Seals
-  Early forms of writing/script

The chapter notes cultural continuity between earlier regional traditions and the later Sindhu–Sarasvatī civilisation.

12. The Invention of Writing

The development of writing was a major turning point in human history.

Writing allowed societies to preserve information about:

-  Rulers
-  Laws
-  Trade
-  Agriculture
-  Administration
-  Beliefs
-  Social life

Different civilisations developed writing systems at different times.



13. Harappan Script

The Harappans used a pictographic script found on objects such as:

-  Seals
-  Pottery
-  Other objects

However:

Important

The **Harappan script, also called Sindhu lipi, has not yet been deciphered.**

Therefore, our understanding of the Harappan civilisation relies heavily on archaeological evidence and material remains.



14. Other Early Writing Systems

Two important early writing systems discussed in the chapter are:



Cuneiform

Used by the **Sumerians of Mesopotamia.**

Cuneiform consisted of wedge-shaped marks pressed into clay tablets.

It was widely used in Mesopotamia by around **3000 BCE.**



Egyptian Hieroglyphs

Ancient Egyptians developed a system of writing known as **hieroglyphic writing.**

Unlike the Harappan script, both Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs have been deciphered.

15. Bronze Age Civilisations Outside India

The chapter discusses three major Bronze Age civilisations that were contemporary with the Harappan civilisation:

Mesopotamian Civilisation

Located around the **Euphrates and Tigris rivers**.

Egyptian Civilisation

Developed along the **Nile River**.

Chinese Civilisation

Developed around the **Huang He and Yangtze rivers**.

These civilisations, like the Harappan civilisation, developed in fertile river plains.

16. Importance of Rivers in Early Civilisations

Rivers played an important role in the growth of early civilisations.

They provided:

-  Water
-  Fertile agricultural land
-  Food resources
-  Transportation opportunities
-  Trade routes

Four important early river-based civilisations were:

 Civilisation	 Major River Region
--	--

 Harappan	Sindhu and Sarasvatī
--	----------------------



Mesopotamian

Euphrates and Tigris



Egyptian

Nile



Chinese

Huang He and Yangtze



17. Mesopotamian Civilisation

Mesopotamia means “**land in between**” and refers to the region between the **Euphrates and Tigris rivers**.

It is mainly associated with present-day:

-  Iraq
-  Kuwait
- Parts of  Turkey
- Parts of  southwestern Iran

The region was part of the **Fertile Crescent**, known for its agricultural potential.



18. Mesopotamian City-States

Several city-based civilisations developed in Mesopotamia.

The four major ones discussed are:

1.  Sumerian
2.  Akkadian
3.  Assyrian
4.  Babylonian

A **city-state** is a sovereign state centred around a city that controls the surrounding territory.



19. Sumerians

The **Sumerians** developed one of the earliest city-based civilisations.

They lived in southern Mesopotamia.

Important contributions:

-  Dams and irrigation canals
-  Mud-brick construction
-  Burnt-brick construction
-  Pottery
-  Trade
-  Cuneiform writing
-  Wheeled carts
-  Sailboats

They also used a number system based on **60**, associated with:

-  60-minute hour
 -  60-second minute
 -  360-degree circle
-



20. Ziggurats

A **ziggurat** was a large stepped, pyramid-shaped temple.

It served as:

-  A religious centre
-  An important administrative centre
-  A place connected with economic activities

The city often grew around its main temple.

Temples were closely connected with:

-  Agriculture
 -  Trade
 -  Transport
 -  Social organisation
-

21. Akkadians

The Akkadians emerged as a major power around **2334 BCE**.

They were centred around the city of **Akkad**.

The Akkadians spoke a language different from the Sumerians but used the **cuneiform writing system**.

22. Assyrians

The **Assyrians** emerged as a major power in northern Mesopotamia.

Their dominance spread across Mesopotamia and neighbouring regions.

They eventually replaced earlier powers in the region.

23. Babylonians and Hammurabi

Babylonia became dominant in central Mesopotamia from around **1900 BCE**.

Hammurabi

Hammurabi became ruler in **1792 BCE** and expanded Babylonian power.

His most important contribution was the:

Code of Hammurabi

It was a collection of rules and regulations dealing with civil and social conduct.

The code became an important historical example of an organised legal system.

24. Egyptian Civilisation

Egyptian civilisation developed along the **Nile River**.

The annual flooding of the Nile deposited rich mud along its banks, making the land highly suitable for agriculture.

Egyptians called their land **Kemet**, meaning “**the black**”, referring to the dark fertile soil of the river valley.

25. Egyptian Calendar

The Egyptian calendar had:

-  12 months
-  30 days in each month
-  5 additional days

Total:

 **365 days**

The calendar was linked to the rising of **Sirius**, also called the Dog Star.

Egyptian seasons included:

-  Inundation
 -  Growing season
 -  Harvest season
-

26. Pharaohs and Egyptian Society

Powerful rulers known as **Pharaohs** emerged in Egypt.

Egyptian society had a clear hierarchy.

Social Hierarchy

Pharaoh



 Government Officials, Nobles & Priests



Free Landholders, Artisans & Merchants



Serfs & Slaves



27. Egyptian Pyramids

Egyptian rulers were buried in structures that developed from **mastabas**.

A mastaba was a rectangular structure placed over a burial chamber.

Over time, mastabas were built one above another to create pyramids.

▲ Step Pyramid at Saqqara

It is one of the prominent examples discussed in the chapter.



28. Mummification

Egyptians believed that the body needed to be preserved after death.



Mummification involved:

- Removing most internal organs
- Drying the body using **natron**
- Oiling the body
- Wrapping it in linen
- Placing it in a coffin
- Performing burial rituals

This was connected with Egyptian beliefs about life after death and the spiritual double called **ka**.



29. Chinese Civilisation

The Chinese civilisation developed along two major rivers:

-  **Huang He (Yellow River)**
-  **Yangtze River**

Early Chinese Neolithic cultures existed in these river valleys from around **7000 BCE**.

Around **2000 BCE**, copper and bronze metallurgy became important.

Urban centres began emerging around **1600 BCE** with advances in:

-  Agriculture
 -  Metallurgy
 -  Craft production
-

30. Chinese Dynasties

Important dynasties discussed in the chapter include:

Shang Dynasty

1600–1046 BCE

Zhou Dynasty

1046–256 BCE

Qin Dynasty

221–206 BCE

The Qin dynasty is associated with the unification of China.

Han Dynasty

206 BCE–220 CE

Iron became widely used in China from around **600 BCE**.

31. Interaction Between Early Civilisations

Early civilisations were not isolated from one another.

They interacted through:

-  Trade
-  Movement of goods
-  Cultural contacts
-  Exchange of technologies
-  Exchange of raw materials

The geographical closeness of Mesopotamia and the Indus/Ghaggar-Sarasvatī regions helped facilitate contacts and trade between the Mesopotamian and Harappan civilisations.

32. The Importance of Archaeology

Archaeology is particularly important for understanding periods where written records are unavailable or limited.

 **Archaeologists study:**

-  Tools
-  Pottery
-  Bones
-  Beads
-  Seals
-  Buildings
-  Metal objects
-  Art and other material remains

These objects help reconstruct:

-  Daily life
-  Food production
-  Technology
-  Trade
-  Social organisation
-  Beliefs and culture

Quick Revision

Topic

★ Key Point

 Biological Evolution	Gradual physical and genetic changes
 Cultural Evolution	Human adaptation through culture and technology
 Hominins	Early human ancestors associated with tool-making
 Archaeology	Study of material remains to understand the past
 Paleolithic	Hunting-gathering and simple stone tools
 Mesolithic	Microlithic tools; transition toward agriculture
 Neolithic	Agriculture, settled life and domestication
 Chalcolithic	Copper and stone tools
 Bronze Age	Bronze metallurgy, towns and early civilisations
 Iron Age	Widespread iron use and more advanced societies
 Neolithic Revolution	Major shift to farming and settled life
 Harappan Script	Pictographic script; not yet deciphered
 Cuneiform	Mesopotamian writing system
 Hieroglyphs	Ancient Egyptian writing system
 City-State	State centred around a city
 Ziggurat	Stepped temple of Mesopotamia
 Code of Hammurabi	Babylonian rules and regulations
 Kemet	Egyptian name meaning “the black”
 Mummification	Preservation of the dead body



Chinese Civilisation

Developed around Huang He and Yangtze



Important Terms to Remember



Biological Evolution



Cultural Evolution



Hominins



Archaeology



Artefacts



Paleolithic



Mesolithic



Neolithic



Chalcolithic



Bronze Age



Iron Age



Neolithic Revolution



Harappan Script / Sindhu Lipi



Cuneiform



Hieroglyphs



City-State



Ziggurat



Code of Hammurabi



Kemet



Mummification



Chinese Civilisation



Important Practice Questions

1

How did humans live on Earth before the beginning of civilisation?

2

How did humans communicate before writing was invented?

3

How is archaeology helpful in understanding our past?

4

Why is the shift to farming during the Neolithic period called a **revolution**?

5

What are the main differences between the **Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic** periods?

6

What is the significance of the invention of writing?

7

Why are rivers important for the development of early civilisations?

8

What were the major contributions of the Sumerians?

9

What was the **Code of Hammurabi**?

10

Describe the importance of the Nile River in the development of Egyptian civilisation.

11

What was mummification and why was it practised in ancient Egypt?

12

Describe the development of early Chinese civilisation.

13

How did early civilisations interact with one another?

The chapter's four central questions specifically focus on early human life, communication before writing, archaeology and interactions between early civilisations.

Chapter 4 Exam Focus

Before your exam, make sure you can:

- ✓ Explain **biological and cultural evolution**
- ✓ Explain how archaeologists study early humans
- ✓ Compare **Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age**
- ✓ Explain the **Neolithic Revolution**
- ✓ Explain the importance of **agriculture and settled life**
- ✓ Describe the **Early Harappan phase**
- ✓ Explain the importance of **writing**
- ✓ Differentiate between **Harappan script, cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs**
- ✓ Explain the importance of **river valleys**
- ✓ Describe **Mesopotamian civilisation**
- ✓ Explain the contributions of the **Sumerians**
- ✓ Explain the **Code of Hammurabi**
- ✓ Describe **Egyptian civilisation, Pharaohs and mummification**
- ✓ Describe the **Chinese civilisation and its major dynasties**
- ✓ Explain how early civilisations **interacted through trade and cultural contacts**

Remember the Big Journey

Early Humans



Stone Tools



Hunting & Gathering



Agriculture



Settled Communities



Towns & Cities



Writing



Civilisations



Trade & Interaction

This sequence captures the broad historical development explored throughout Chapter 4.

