

# GEOGRAPHY OF ANCIENT INDIA

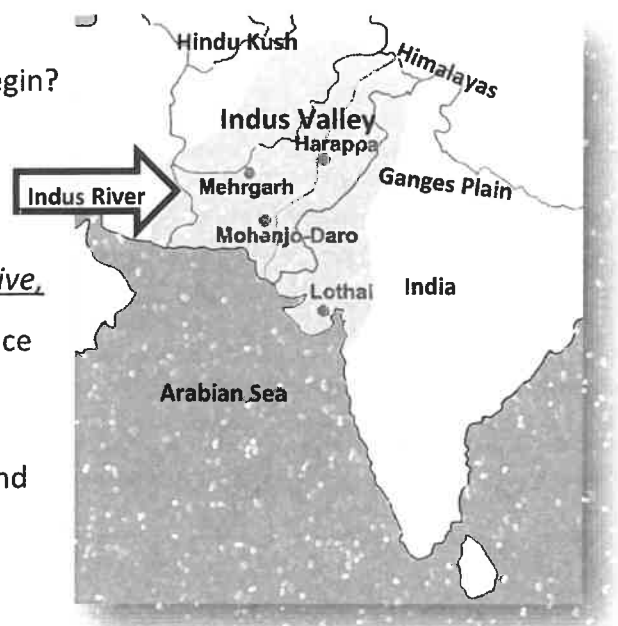
*Harappan Culture 2500 BCE-1900 BCE, Indo-Aryans 2000 BCE-300 BCE ,  
The Mauryan Empire 321 BCE- 184 BCE, Gupta Empire 310 CE-600 CE*

## ***GEOGRAPHY - PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND HOW IT MAY INFLUENCE AN ECONOMY AND CULTURE.***

The Indus Valley Civilization, referred to as Harappan Culture, is named for the Indus River. This river starts in the snow covered Himalayan Mountains of North India and winds its way to the Arabian Sea. On its way it flows through parts of modern day Pakistan, northwest India, and Afghanistan. The Indus River is one of the longer in the world covering some 2,000 miles. Its rich soil is ideal for farmers who, at this time, used irrigation to grow their crops. This area also receives rain during the monsoon season. While many people associate this season as a time of intense rain it is actually a time when the winds change. During India's monsoon season, hot air flows across the Indian Ocean and forms clouds full of water. As these clouds move across the cooler land it drops its rain, often resulting in floods.

Since its discovery in 1992, not much is known about the Indus Valley Civilization, but researchers believe that it flourished from about 2600 to 1900 BCE before it mysteriously vanished. From that point, the Ancient Indian civilizations grew bigger and smaller, much like an accordion. The *Indo-Aryan* people migrated through a pass in the northern Hindu Kush mountains in approximately 2000 BCE, settling in the Indus River Valley and expanding to the Ganges Plain. Later, under *Mauryan* rule in 324 BCE the empire united, expanding into much of modern India, only to shrink in size under the *Gupta Empire* (about 400 BCE) to a region surrounding the Ganges River, south of the Himalayas.

1. Adaptation: Where did the Indus River Civilization begin?
2. **Support with Evidence from the Text** - Support the following sentence with evidence in the form of a direct quote from the text: *The Indus River is expansive, crossing many lands.* Make sure to place the sentence chosen in quotation marks when you write it down.
3. Draw a quick sketch of the Indus Valley Civilization and label four physical features.



## PART 1 INDUS RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATION 2500 BCE-1900 BCE

At this station, you will learn about:

### ACHIEVEMENTS-THE LASTING CONTRIBUTIONS OF A CIVILIZATION.

Archeologists are still uncovering the mysteries of the Indus Valley Civilization, but they have discovered that these people had a written language. Well over 4,000 indus symbols



have been found on seals or ceramic pots and over a dozen other materials, including a sign that hung over the gate of the inner citadel of the Indus city of Dholavira. Still, archeologists have not been unable to decipher the language coding. The people of the Indus River Valley had very well-planned cities. These cities were laid out in a grid-like pattern that followed the cardinal directions. Houses were often built of oven-baked, clay bricks and were similar in size. Each home was usually one to two stories high

and had a center courtyard, a bath with a toilet, running water, and drains. Waste water was sent to sewer systems. The twin capital cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro had a *citadel* (fortress) that stood upon a hill-top at the edge of the town overlooking the citizens below and safe from monsoon floods. The cities had large granaries that held surplus grain. They also had a large pool in the center of the cities. While it is unknown what the purpose of these pools many believe that they could have been for public bathing, religious rituals, or even, perhaps, for swimming. The artisans of the Indus Valley created high quality tools that they used to produce fine pottery, cotton clothing, and jewelry.

1. **Support with Evidence from the Text** - Support the following sentence with evidence in the form of a direct quote from the text: The Indus Valley people had well organized cities. Make sure to place the sentence chosen in quotation marks when you write it down.
2. Which do you believe is the most impressive achievement of the Harappan Culture? Explain your answer.

## PART 2 INDUS RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATION 2500 BCE-1900 BCE

At this station, you will learn about:

**ECONOMY-HOW A CIVILIZATION MAKES MONEY THROUGH THE BUYING AND SELLING OF GOODS AND SERVICES.**

The economy of the Indus Valley Civilization was based upon agricultural goods and the natural resources of the area. It is believed that the Indus Valley people were one of the first



to use wheeled transportation and developed water crafts to sail to distant markets. These crafts were sailboats with one single mast and sail. The people of this area traded within their vast area, as well as with western China, Mesopotamia and other foreign markets. Wheat, barley, rice, cotton, peas, dates and melons were a few of their domestic crops grown by farmers. Farmers used irrigation from water collected during the monsoonal season to water their varying crops. Archeologists recently uncovered giant reservoirs where it is speculated that rain water was kept to use during the dry season. They also used domestic animals such as the water buffalo to use in the fields. Other domestic animals included sheep,

goats, pigs, and cattle. Artisans of this civilization created a high quality pottery that was often adorned with elegant designs. This region also offered useful natural resources such as fresh water, fish, timber, gold, silver, and semiprecious stones. Blue lapis lazuli, a bright blue metamorphic rock, is found in the nearby mountains and was used in jewelry making. We also know that the Harappan Culture used a standard set of weights and measures. This was used to insure accuracy in trading.

1. Why is it important to have wheeled transportation?
2. **Thinks about it:** How did the natural resources of the Indus Valley Civilization aid the strong economy of the Harappan people?

## PART 3 INDUS RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATION 2500 BCE-1900 BCE

*At this station, you will learn about:*

**LEADERSHIP/ GOVERNMENT - HOW A CIVILIZATION CREATES AN ORGANIZED WAY OF LEADERSHIP.**

**RELIGION - A BELIEF SYSTEM THAT INFLUENCES THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CIVILIZATION.**

Archeologists are uncertain if the Harappan civilization was led by priests, kings, or elected officials, however, we do know that the leader of their government had a large land area to govern with tens of thousands of citizens. It is believed, because of their size, that the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were twin capitals therefore, there may have been co-rulers. The job of the ruler or rulers was to ensure that the people of the Indus River Valley had sufficient food, grain and protection.



While no one knows for sure how the Harappan culture worshiped, some speculations have been made. Many believe, based on sculptures that have been found, that like some other early civilizations these people were polytheistic, that they believed in more than one god or deity. One such deity may have been a mother goddess, who was responsible for all creation. Due to the similarities in deities and fertility statues, Hinduism, the oldest religion in the world, is often regarded as having roots in the life and practices of this civilization. Being an agrarian society, one based on agriculture or farming, this is quite possible. Other objects and sculptures made of clay, bronze and silver, seem to show that these people also may have worshipped animals, in particular bulls. This may indicate that the Indus Valley culture may have influenced the later neighboring Indian society which today places a reverence on cattle.



While there are signs of some swords and other weapons there is not enough evidence to support the idea that the Indus people had a standing army or were engaged in harsh battles with neighbors. Still, some speculate that an attack by the Indo-Aryans may be one of the reasons that the people of the Indus Valley disappeared about 1900 BCE.

1. According to the text, what is known about Harappan government?
2. Why do you think the Indus people would have worshipped bulls?
3. Provide evidence from the text that supports the idea that Hinduism began in India.
4. Why is there a lack of evidence to support that the Indo-Aryans attacked?

# PART 1 THE INDO-ARYANS 2000 BCE-300 BCE

At this station, you will learn about:

**GOVERNMENT - HOW A CIVILIZATION CREATES AN ORGANIZED WAY OF LEADERSHIP.**

**ECONOMY-HOW A CIVILIZATION MAKES MONEY THROUGH THE BUYING AND SELLING OF GOODS AND SERVICES.**

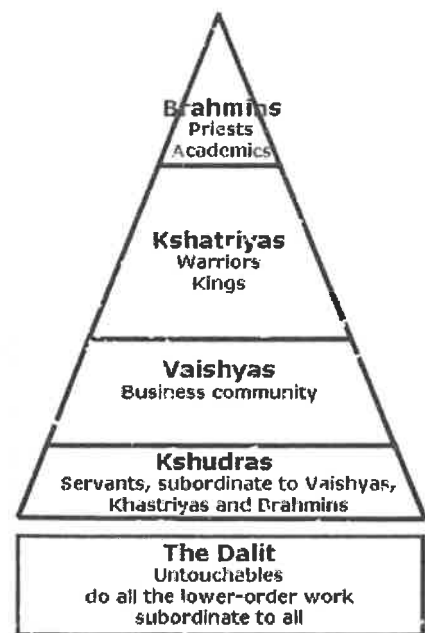
**SOCIAL CLASS - HOW A CIVILIZATION IS DIVIDED INTO CLASSES THAT HAVE DIFFERENT ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIVILEGES.**

Some archeologists speculate that an attack by the Indo-Aryans may be one of the reasons that the people of the Indus Valley disappeared about 1900 BCE. The *Indo-Aryan* people, often referred to as Aryans, migrated through a pass in the northern Hindu Kush mountains in approximately 2000 BCE, ultimately settling in the Indus River Valley. When the nomadic Aryans dominated this region there were individual tribes throughout the valley. Each tribe was led by a *raja* or chief. Aryan hymns, songs and poems depict the people as delighted in waging war and raiding each other's herds of cattle.

As a nomadic herding civilization the *Aryans* traded cattle as both food and a type of currency. After all, cattle proved to be a valuable food source providing milk, meat and butter. Wealth was measured in cattle, which explains why raiding was common. In fact, the Aryans considered the animal so sacred that eventually a ban was placed on eating meat.

The Aryans brought with them the caste system. This social system determines one's place in society by one's birth. The caste or *jati* is the group of people that comprise a singular social class. While it is unfair, once a person is born into one of the four groups (referred to as *varnas*) they have little to no change of moving up the social ladder. The people were prohibited to marry outside of their caste. They lived in communities with each other and did not mingle with others outside their group. While the social system evolved over time, the top of the social hierarchy were the *Brahmans*, or priests. Next, on the hierarchy were army warriors and rulers called *Kshatriyas*. Commoners including merchants, artisans and farmers were called *Vaisyas*. The *Vaisyas* tended to herds, made and sold products and farmed. Lastly, the *Sudras* or *Kshudras* were unskilled laborers and servants. However, outside of the four main *varnas* were a group called *Pariahs* (slaves, also referred to as *Dalit*). The *Pariahs*, sometimes called "untouchables" were considered unclean and were rejected, forced to live outside of the villages.

1. What evidence supports that the Aryans were probable attackers of the Harappan Culture?
2. Why was cattle so important in the Aryan culture?
3. Use the following terms to describe the caste system the Indo-Aryans brought to India: Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras, Pariahs



## PART 2 THE INDO-ARYANS 2000 BCE-300 BCE

At this station, you will learn about:

### RELIGION—A BELIEF SYSTEM THAT INFLUENCES THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CIVILIZATION.

Priests collected hymns, epics (long poems), religious rituals and legends orally passed down for hundreds of years. They created a holy book called *Vedas* written in *Sanskrit*, the language of the Aryans. Priests used four *Vedas*, referred to as “books of knowledge”, that formed the basis of religious practice. While the Aryans left no artifacts, the Vedas have offered great information about the daily lives, values and rituals of the Aryan people. The Vedas are the earliest written source for the religion that would form the foundation of Hinduism. Later, Hindus believed in many deities. However, the



most important deities are Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Shiva (the Destroyer). These three gods are all part of the same universal spirit. Fundamental to Hinduism is the belief that both animals and people have souls that can be reborn into other beings after death. The concept of being reborn is called *reincarnation*. Another basic concept of Hinduism is the belief that there is *dharma* or religious duty, and *karma*, or actions. The two concepts together determine a person’s social class or *caste*. Those who do not perform religious duty or have bad karma will be reincarnated into another, lower caste. People that have reached spiritual purity can escape reincarnation on to earth.

In 553 BCE a young prince named Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) founded a new religion based on a similar concept of reincarnation called Buddhism. Buddhism is not a religion, but more a way of life and the goal of life is enlightenment, a complete understanding of truth. Buddha developed his philosophy based on the idea that people suffer from desire, which he outlined in the *four noble truths*. Furthermore, desire causes a person to be reincarnated to more earthly suffering. His basic prescription for ending suffering was to teach people to lead compassionate lives which he outlined in the *eightfold path*. Ultimately, a person that leads a life without desire, will reach a state of freedom called *nirvana* and he/she will not be reincarnated to earthy suffering.



1. Why are the Vedas an important religious text for *historians*?
2. Explain how reincarnation, karma and castes are related to each other.
3. Compare and Contrast: Describe one similarity and one difference of Buddhism and Hinduism.

# THE MAURYAN EMPIRE 321 BCE - 184 BCE

At this station, you will learn about:

## GOVERNMENT - HOW A CIVILIZATION CREATES AN ORGANIZED WAY OF LEADERSHIP.

After over 200 years of battles between Greeks and Persians, in 320 BCE Chandragupta Maurya defeated invaders and united India under his rule. Through war and conquest, which he paid for through harsh taxation, King Chandragupta Maurya expanded the empire through much of modern India. He also improved roads and cleared land for agriculture. While he may have led a well organized empire, he was known for being a ruthless leader, who used brutality to oppress the people into order. Considering he was so despised by his people, King Chandragupta lived in constant fear for his life. He had servants taste his food for poison and even slept in different bedrooms every night so his possible attackers would not know where he was.



In 269 BCE King Ashoka the Great (the grandson of Chandragupta) ruled much of the subcontinent of India, and even expanded into Modern day Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Unlike his grandfather



and father he was known for being a fair, compassionate ruler. Religion was also very important during the reign of Ashoka the Great. After a particularly bloody battle, he renounced war and became a Buddhist. He spread Buddhism throughout India by sending missionaries to teach about Buddhism throughout India. In fact, honesty and truth became so important to the people that stealing was almost eliminated.

Ashoka the Great recorded laws in local language on tall stone pillars called rock edicts. Rock edicts could be found all over the vast *Mauryan* Empire. Ashoka even sent government officials to cities to explain what the edicts to the citizens of the vast Mauryan Empire. He also provided free hospitals, veterinary clinics and built roads.

1. According to the text, Mauryan King Chandragupta was a harsh leader, “who used brutality to oppress the people into order.” What does the word *oppress* most likely mean in that sentence?
2. Explain two ways King Ashoka created an organized way of leadership.

# THE GUPTA EMPIRE 320 CE-600 CE

At this station, you will learn about:

**ACHIEVEMENTS-THE LASTING CONTRIBUTIONS OF A CIVILIZATION.**

**ECONOMY-HOW A CIVILIZATION MAKES MONEY THROUGH THE BUYING AND SELLING OF GOODS AND SERVICES.**

**RELIGION-A BELIEF SYSTEM THAT INFLUENCES THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CIVILIZATION.**

After King Ashoka died the empire fell into a series of separate kingdoms once again. However, in about 320 CE the New Gupta Empire unified north central India. From 320 CE to 600 CE the Gupta Empire is known as the “Golden Age of Ancient India” because people experienced great peace and prosperity. During this time there was religious freedom, government sponsored health care, and artisans were encouraged to produce their crafts. Learning flourished during the Gupta Empire because the court welcomed poets, playwrights, philosophers and scientists. The famous folktale, “Sinbad the Sailor” was written in this era. Gupta mathematicians invented the concept of zero and developed many principles of Algebra. In fact, the symbols for numbers 1-9 referred to as Arabic numerals were devised by the Gupta and were used by traders all over the Middle East. Furthermore, Gupta scientists knew the earth was round and philosophized about gravity. They also had doctors that set bones, performed surgery and invented hundreds of medical instruments. Gupta doctors also gave citizens inoculations. Inoculations give a person a mild form of a disease in order for the body to build resistance against a more severe form of the disease. Today, doctors all over the world give inoculations for small pox, rubella and even the flu virus.

Along with spices, cotton cloth, carpets and jewelry, achievements of the Gupta Empire were traded all over the world. Sea and land trade routes connected India with Central Asia, Arabia and Europe. Indian merchants traded for Arabian horses, Chinese silk and even Roman gold!

Later, the Gupta rulers promoted Hinduism by education based on the religious writings of the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* further confirm the Hindu idea that *all living things have a universal soul* and promote physical and mental self discipline through the practice of yoga. The Gupta built elaborate temples depicting tales in the epics and made Hinduism the official religion of the empire.

1. Describe three achievements of Ancient India.
2. Use evidence from the text in the form of a direct excerpt (portion of text) that supports the idea that the Gupta had long-lasting achievements.
3. **Connect to today:** Explain why even today many Hindus are vegetarian.

