India's geography shaped the rise of the first civilizations in the Indus Valley.

The Geography of India

How did physical geography and climate influence the development of civilization in India?

India and several other modern-day countries make up the subcontinent of India. A subcontinent is a large landmass that is smaller than a continent. The Indian subcontinent is part of the continent of Asia.

Mountains, Plains, and Rivers

On its northern border, India is separated from the rest of Asia by rugged mountain systems. The Himalaya are one of these mountain systems. You have probably heard of Mount Everest, the highest peak in the Himalaya. Mount Everest is more than 29,000 feet tall. That is nearly 5.5 miles (8.8 km), which makes Mount Everest the tallest mountain in the world.

Wide fertile plains lie at the foot of India's extensive mountain ranges. The plains owe their rich soil to the three great rivers that flow through the region. These rivers are the Indus (IHN • duhs), the Ganges (GAN • jeez), and the Brahmaputra (BRAHM • uh • POO • truh). India's people rely on these rivers for farming, transportation, and trade.

The landforms in central and southern India are much different from the landforms in the north. Along the west and east coasts of the subcontinent are lush fertile lands. Farther inland, there are two chains of mountains that have worn down over time. As the mountains eroded, they left areas of rugged hills. Between the mountains is a dry highland known as the Deccan Plateau (DEH • kuhn pla • TOH). The southern two-thirds of India is part of this huge plateau.

India's civilization has been shaped by its climate as well as by its physical landscape. Seasonal winds called monsoons (mahn • SOONZ) have a large influence on India's climate.

During winter, monsoon winds blow cold, dry air from the Himalaya east to west across India. During summer, warmer land temperatures cause the winds to change direction. Summer monsoon winds blow west to east from the Arabian Sea. They bring warm, wet air and pouring rains.

The summer rains bring farmers water that they need for their crops. With good rainfall, farmers can grow large amounts of food. Because of this, people celebrate the arrival of the monsoon rains. However, monsoon rains can also cause damage. Very heavy rains sometimes cause floods that destroy crops. Floods can even kill people and animals.

Too little rain can also be a problem. If the rains come late, there may be a long dry period called a drought. A serious drought can bring disaster to farmers. If lots of farm crops are ruined, many people may go hungry or starve.

Explaining How do monsoon winds affect life in India?

They bring warm, wet air, and pouring rains.

The Indus Valley Civilization

How did the people of the Indus River Valley build cities?

Thousands of years ago, India's first civilization began in the valley around the Indus River. The Indus Valley civilization is called the cradle of ancient India. Like the early civilizations in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Indus Valley civilization developed near a great river system.

About 5,000 years ago, nomads settled in valleys along the Indus River in an area that is now Pakistan. The first settlements were built on the shores of the river. The soil was rich there, and farmers grew large crops of wheat, barley, and beans.

With abundant crops, not all the people needed to farm. Many people made tools and constructed houses. Some supported themselves by trading extra food and goods. The Indus people prospered and built cities. The Indus civilization spread over much of western India and Pakistan.

Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa

The Indus culture flourished between 2600 B.C. and 1900 B.C. We know about the Indus culture from studying the ruins of two
major cities, Mohenjo-Daro (moh • HEHN • joh DAHR • oh) and Harappa (huh • RA • puh).

At their peak, both Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa had more than 35,000 residents. The cities were designed almost exactly alike. Each city had dozens of streets. Larger streets were paved with tan-colored bricks. The smaller streets that crossed them were often left unpaved. At the west end of each city stood a fortress built on a brick platform and surrounded by strong, thick walls.

The Indus Valley people used oven-baked bricks to build their homes. Most houses had flat wooden roofs. The houses had enclosed courtyards, and some were several stories tall.

The civilization's engineers and builders were highly skilled. Large buildings stored grain for the entire population. Wells supplied water, and every house had at least one indoor bathroom. Wastewater flowed through pipes to pits outside the city walls. Houses also had garbage chutes connected to bins in the streets.

**What was life like?**

Archaeologists have learned much about Indus Valley culture by studying its city ruins. For example, the ruins show that cities’ royal palaces and temples may have been enclosed in a fortress. This shows the importance of both religion and government in the settlements of the Indus Valley.

Most Indus Valley people resided in farming villages surrounding the cities. They grew rice, barley, wheat, peas, and cotton. City residents were merchants, shopkeepers, and artisans. They made and sold copper and bronze tools, clay pottery, and cotton cloth. Artisans also made jewelry from shells, ivory, and gold. Archaeologists have even found toys among the ruins.

Indus Valley merchants traveled as far as Mesopotamia to trade. Some traders made the difficult trip through the mountains to Mesopotamia. Others probably sailed to Mesopotamia along the southern coast of Asia.

**Describing** How did most Indus Valley people earn a living?

**Thinking Like a HISTORIAN**

**Researching on the Internet**

Historians have found many clay seals and stamps in Harappa. These objects are covered in writing and pictures. Historians have not determined the meaning of these writings. Use the Internet to find images of some of these seals. Create a list of what you think each might mean. Then discuss your theories with your class. For more information about using the Internet for research, read the chapter *What Does a Historian Do?*

**Aryan Migrations and Settlements**

**How did the Aryans influence early India?**

Sometime around 1900 B.C., the people of the Indus Valley began to abandon their cities and villages. Why did the people leave? Archaeologists have found several possible causes. There was a severe drought that lasted for hundreds of years. It destroyed crops and caused people to starve. Earthquakes and floods killed many more people and changed the course of the Indus River. Meanwhile, groups of people called the Aryans (AR • ee • uhnz) migrated to India. Soon a new civilization emerged.

**The Indo-Europeans**

The Aryans were not a race or ethnic group. Many historians believe that the Aryan people's language was part of a large language family known as Indo-European. A language family is a group of similar languages. Many modern Indian languages, like Hindi, are part of the Indo-European family. So are many European languages, including English. The Aryans were speakers of Indo-European languages.

Indo-European people lived in central Asia but began migrating to other places. Some moved west to Europe or south to Iran. The Aryans went to India. Like most Indo-Europeans, the Aryans raised cattle for meat, milk, and butter. They moved from place to place to find pastures and water for their cattle. The Aryans were expert horse riders and hunters, as well as fierce warriors. As they moved about, the Aryans sometimes raided nearby villages for food.

From about 1500 to 1000 B.C., bands of Aryans moved throughout India. These groups mixed with the descendants of the Indus Valley people. Together, they created a new culture. Over time, the Aryans in India adopted a new way of life. They settled down in one place and became farmers, though they still raised cattle. Eventually, the Aryans saw their herds as sacred and banned the use of cattle as food.
The Aryans began to make iron tools to clear forests so they could farm the land. They also built irrigation systems. Gradually, they turned the Ganges River valley into productive farmland. In the north, farmers grew grains such as wheat, millet, and barley. Millet is a grain that is still an important food in many parts of the world. Farmers planted rice in the fertile river valleys. In the south, farmers grew crops such as cotton, vegetables, pepper, ginger, and cinnamon.

The Aryans lived in tribes. Each tribe was led by a raja (RAH • jah), or prince. The rajas created their own small kingdoms, which often fought each other over cattle, treasure, and land.

Like most nomadic people, the early Aryans had no written language. After they settled in villages, they developed a written language called Sanskrit (SAN • skriht). Sanskrit gave people a way to record sales, trade, and land ownership. Eventually, Aryan hymns, stories, poems, and prayers were also written in Sanskrit. Later, they were recorded and collected into sacred texts known as the Vedas (VAY • duhs). Examples of the Vedas remain today. This prayer in the Vedas asks for divine help in offering sacrifices:

"Let us invoke [call upon] today, to aid our labour, the Lord of Speech, . . . May he hear kindly all our invocations [prayers] who gives all bliss for aid, whose works are righteous."

—from Visvakarman," Rig-Veda, Book 10, Hymn LXXXI

**Identifying** How did the Aryans change their way of life after they settled in India?

**Ancient Indian Society**

**How was society in ancient India organized?**

As the Aryans settled into India, people set up towns along India's Ganges River. Most people still farmed for a living. Some workers specialized in crafts such as carpentry or weaving. Others took part in trade. As India's economy grew, a system of social classes gradually developed.

**What were the Varnas?**

The four social classes of ancient India are called varnas (VUR • nehs). People were considered members of the varna into which they were born. The most powerful varnas were the Brahmins (BRAH • mihns) and Kshatriyas (KSHA • tree • uhs). The Brahmins were the priests—the people who performed religious ceremonies. The Kshatriyas were warriors who ran the government and army.

Next were the Vaisyas (VYSH • yuhs), or commoners. Vaisyas were usually farmers, craftspeople, and merchants. Below the Vaisyas came the Sudras (SOO • druhs). Sudras were manual workers and servants who had few rights. Most Indians were in the Sudra varna. The four varna were divided into thousands of smaller groups known as jati (JAH • tee). Many jati were based on the type of work a person did. These jati had their own strict rules for diet, marriage, and social customs.

Scholars refer to the varna system as a caste (KAST) system. In such a system, people remain in the same caste or social group for life. People's castes determine the jobs they may take. Caste also affects people's choice of marriage partners.

At the lowest level of society were the Untouchables. The Untouchables were not part of the varna system. They did work that varna Indians would not do, such as collecting trash, skinning animals, and carrying dead bodies.

In ancient India, the family was the center of life. Grandparents, parents, and children lived together in an extended family. Elder family members were respected. The oldest male in the family was in charge of the entire household.

Indian men had more rights than women. Males inherited property, unless there were no sons in the family. Men attended school or became priests, while women were educated at home.

In India's leading families, a boy had a guru (GUR • oo), or teacher, until he attended school in the city. Young men from these families could marry only after finishing 12 years of education.

In India, parents arranged marriages for their children. Even today, many marriages are arranged. In early India, boys and girls often married in their teens. People could not get divorced.

**Explaining** What was family life like in ancient India?
LESSON 1 REVIEW

Review Vocabulary

1. Why was the development of Sanskrit important to making the Vedas last?
   They developed trading

Answer the Guiding Questions

2. **Explaining** Although the monsoons may bring severe storms, they are considered necessary in India. Why?
   They need water and if they don't it

3. **Summarizing** What characteristics did the Indus Valley cities have in common?
   They were both by a very rich place

4. **Describing** How did the Aryans interact with the Indus Valley people?
   They became a civilization.

5. **Categorizing** What are the four major social groups in the varna system?
   Scholars refer to the varna system as

6. **ARGUMENT** What is the most important way the Aryans affected India? Write a brief essay that summarizes your ideas about their impact.
   Brought cattle.
   People now worship