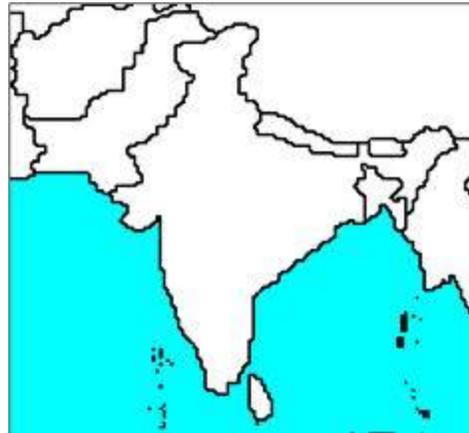


Ancient India: An Advanced Civilization in Southern Asia

I. Geography

Indian civilization began in the Indus River Valley around 3,000 B.C. India is a land of diversity, with many different languages, religions, and cultures.

India is sometimes termed a “subcontinent” because its geographical features sharply separate it from the rest of Asia. The Himalayan Mountain range in north Asia is the largest mountain range in the world. The two major river systems are the Indus River and Ganges River. Ancient India was geographically isolated and protected against invasion by the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and the Himalayan Mountains. However a few mountain passes such as the “Khyber Pass” enables ancient invaders to enter India. The Deccan Plateau is located south of the Indus and Ganges River Valleys. This area is mostly hills, mountains, and rocky soil.



Little unity existed between northern and southern India. The numerous mountain ranges tended to isolate people from each other and foster a feeling of regional loyalty called “regionalism”. The main feature of India’s climate is the “monsoons”, which are seasonal winds that bring rain to India. Indian farmers depend on these rains to grow their crops. If the rains come late, then crops die and people starve. Heavy monsoon rains can lead to flooding.

II. History of Ancient India

The first civilization in India developed along the Indus River Valley. As in Egypt and Mesopotamia, a river deposited rich soil all over the plain during its annual flood. The geographic area covered by this civilization exceeded both Mesopotamia and Egypt. Farmers grew barley, wheat, dates, and melons. Food surpluses allowed people to build large cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Each of these cities had more than 30,000 people. Remarkably, almost all the houses were connected to public sewers and a water supply.

Trade was an important part of the economy. Many small clay containers, probably used for trading purposes, have been discovered by archaeologists. They also have found pottery kilns and evidence of the use of metals. The Harappans developed their own form of writing, although scholars still cannot decipher (read) it. No one knows exactly why this civilization collapsed, but it happened suddenly. Some scholars believe that Aryan tribes from Central Asia came through the Khyber Pass and conquered the Indus River peoples.

Questions to Answer

1. How was ancient India protected against invasion?
2. What are “monsoons” and how do they affect India?
3. How did geography affect the development of ancient Indian society?
4. Why did the Indus River Valley civilization suddenly decline?