Geography and History Activity

networks

Ancient India

Lesson 1 *Early Civilizations*

Understanding Human–Environment Interaction: Ancient India

Much of the advanced Harappan civilization came about through human interaction with their geographic environment. Not only did the Indus River provide water for crops, but it also produced mud for making bricks. Mud bricks enabled people to make stronger buildings. This skill developed because the environment by the river made mud bricks possible.

Over hundreds of years, the people's relationship with the river grew. They learned how to use the water to wash away waste and to build boats for water transportation and trade. Gradually, they got better at using the environment for human advancement.

The Harappan civilization was affected by its geography in other ways. The Himalaya sit on an unstable geographical break between Asia and India, where earthquakes are common. There is evidence that somewhere close to the end of the Harappan civilization, the Indus River changed its course. Severe flooding followed. It is possible that an earthquake caused this change in the river and many Indus Valley cities were destroyed.
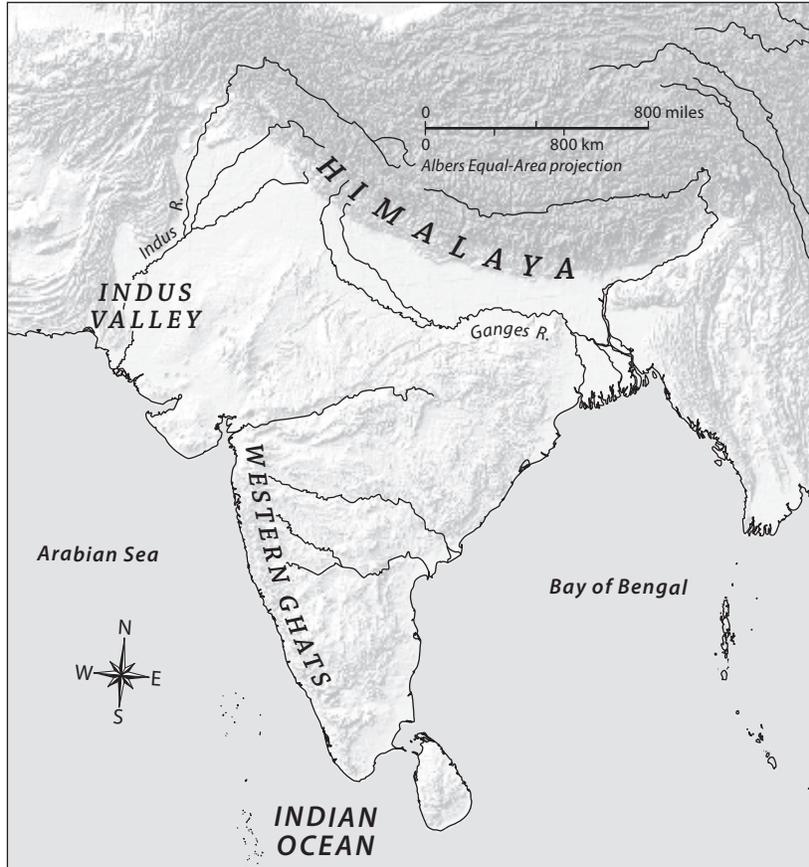
There also may have been changes in the pattern of the monsoons. These changes may have caused a drought that lasted hundreds of years. Between these two events—flooding and drought—little would be left of this early culture.

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The Geography of India

By the time the Aryans arrived, the natural disasters were probably over and the river valleys were left with a very small population. There would have been little there to change the Aryan culture or language. However, the river itself would change the way these newcomers lived.

The Aryans originally came from central Asia. They roamed the mountains on horseback as nomads with their flocks and herds. The steep, rocky terrain and cold climate did not offer them comfortable places to stop and build houses; so, with their sure-footed animals, they moved farther and farther into the mountains. They would have depended on the snow for water and small patches of plants to feed their animals; a hard life. Finally, they traveled all the way over the mountains and into the river valleys of the Indian subcontinent.

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The river made their lives much easier than the mountains did. With trees and plants surrounding the valley, they would not have to travel far to find food for themselves and their animals. Because of this fertile environment, they began to grow crops and raise animals as farmers instead of roaming as nomads. Before long they had settled in the region.

The resource used most by the Harrapans was mud. Once the Aryans had settled in the valley, however, their main resource was not mud, but iron. By the time they reached the Ganges River, they were using iron tools to clear forests and create irrigation systems to increase the growth of their crops. The wet lands by the river provided rice, while the drier land produced wheat and other grains. Again, these early people found ways to use their natural environment to improve their lives. Eventually, these plentiful resources allowed Aryan society the time to create a written language and a complex social system.

Directions: Answer the following questions.

Understanding the Concept

1. **Comparing and Contrasting** Use the chart below to compare how the Indus Valley civilization used their environment with how the Aryans used theirs.

Indus Valley	Aryans

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2. **Describing** Study the map. Trace the migration of the Aryans from the northwestern mountains to the Ganges River. To what physical features was a nomadic life best suited? To what physical features was a settled farm life best suited? Explain your answers.

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Applying the Concept

3. **Drawing Conclusions** In what ways did the river societies and nomads take control of and use their environment? In what ways could they not control their environment?

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