

# Ancient India



To the northeast of Africa lies the enormous continent of Asia. The south central part of Asia is known as the Indian subcontinent, which includes the country of India. Present-day India is a nation whose beginnings stretch back into the distant mists of time. When historians talk about ancient India, however, they are referring to the entire Indian subcontinent, not present-day India. Other present-day countries located on the Indian subcontinent include Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, and the island nation of Sri Lanka.

The ancient civilization that developed on the Indian subcontinent was greatly influenced by the physical geography of the region. Look at the map on the opposite page. Notice the Himalayan mountain range. These towering peaks are the highest mountains in the world. They formed a natural barrier between ancient India and the rest of Asia. To the south, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal prevented contact with other people. This isolation meant that civilizations developed on the Indian subcontinent without outside influences and had their own unique cultures.

Look again at the map and find the Indus River. It begins high in the Himalayas and eventually empties into the Arabian Sea. Like other river valleys you have studied, the Indus River valley was the site of some early settlements, including Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Other rivers, like the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, also were home to early farming villages. These rivers provided the water and rich soil that allowed ancient cultures to grow and prosper.

In time, two ancient empires arose in India. As the maps below show, the Mauryan Empire was the first to develop, and the Gupta Empire was the second.

Two major religions have roots in ancient India. They are Hinduism and Buddhism. As you study this unit, you will learn about the development and beliefs of these two faiths. You will also study the achievements of the Mauryan and the Gupta empires.

### The Mauryan Empire, 269–232 B.C.E.



### The Gupta Empire, 320–550 C.E.

