

# 1. The Indian Subcontinent and History

## 1.1 Geographical conditions and the course of history

## 1.2 Geographical features of India

## 1.3 The Indian subcontinent

### 1.1 Geographical conditions and history

In the fifth standard, we saw at some length that there is a close relationship between man and his environment. We saw how the changes in the lifestyle of the early man and his technology were related to the changes in his surroundings. We also reviewed the history of human civilization from the Stone Age to the agricultural civilizations that flourished on the banks of rivers.

History is a coherent account of the significant past events in the progress of human culture. Time, place, society and individuals are the four major pillars of history. We cannot write history without them. Of these four components, 'place' is related to geography or geographical conditions. In this sense, history and



### Let's discuss.

- What occupations are seen in your locality?
- What crops are grown in your surroundings?

geography are inseparable. History is influenced by geographical conditions in many ways.



Types of houses

Our diet, clothing, housing, occupation, in fact, all human life in any region depends to a large extent on its geographical characteristics. For example, the life of the people in hilly regions is more strenuous than that of the people on the plains. Not much fertile land is available in the hilly regions, while in the plains, it is available on a large scale. That is why, grains and vegetables are scarce in hilly areas. In comparison, people on the plains get them in a sufficient measure. Naturally, this has an impact on the diet of the people. In hilly regions, people depend more on hunting and gathering for their food. We also find other such differences in the lifestyle of the people of the hilly regions and those of the plains.

The climate, rainfall, agricultural produce, flora and fauna of the region where we live are the sources of our livelihood. The lifestyle and culture of a region develops with their support. Human settlements have flourished wherever the means of living are plentiful. Over a period of time, these settlements develop further into villages and towns. But sometimes reasons like the degradation of the environment, drought, invasions, etc. lead to the scarcity of those means. People are forced to leave their settlements. Villages and towns become deserted. We see many such instances in history. Thus we see that there is a very close relation between history and geography.

## 1.2 Geographical features of India

Our country India extends far and wide. At its north lie the Himalayas; to the east, the Bay of Bengal; to the west the Arabian Sea; and to the south, the Indian Ocean. Except for the islands of Andaman - Nicobar and Lakshwadeep, the rest of the country is contiguous.

We have to take into account this region, henceforth referred to as 'ancient India', when we study the ancient history of India. Before 1947, today's Pakistan and Bangladesh were also a part of India.

The following regions are seen to be important when we look at the course of Indian history.

1. The Himalayas
2. The plains of Sindhu-Ganga-Brahmaputra rivers
3. The Thar Desert
4. The Deccan Plateau
5. The coastal regions
6. The islands in the seas



**Himalaya**

**1. Himalayas :** The Hindukush and Himalaya ranges have created an impenetrable wall on the northern side of the Indian subcontinent. This wall has separated the Indian subcontinent from the deserts of Central Asia. However, there is a land route through the Khyber and Bolan passes in the Hindukush mountains. This route was connected to an ancient trade route. The trade route from China passed through Central Asia and reached Arabia. It is known as the 'Silk Route' or 'Silk Road', because silk was the main commodity exported to the western countries using this road. The route through the passes was used by many foreign invaders to enter ancient India. Many foreign travellers also came to India by this route.



**Khyber Pass**

**2. The plains of the Sindhu-Ganga-Brahmaputra :** This region consists of the basins of the three big rivers, Sindhu, Ganga, Brahmaputra and their tributaries. This region extends from Sindh-Punjab in





**River Ganga**

the west to the present day Bangladesh in the east. It was in this region that the earliest Indian civilization of Harappa and the later States and empires of ancient India emerged.



**Thar Desert**

**3. The Thar Desert :** The Thar desert spreads across Rajasthan, Haryana and some parts of Gujarat. A part of the desert lies in today's Pakistan. The desert has the Satluj river to its north, the Aravalli mountain range to its east, the Rann of Kachchh to its south and the Indus (Sindhu) river to its west. The Ghaggar river that originates in Himachal Pradesh reaches the Thar desert. It is known as 'Hakra' in Pakistan. Its course in Rajasthan and Pakistan has now dried up. Many sites of the Harappan civilization are situated along the now dry course of the river.

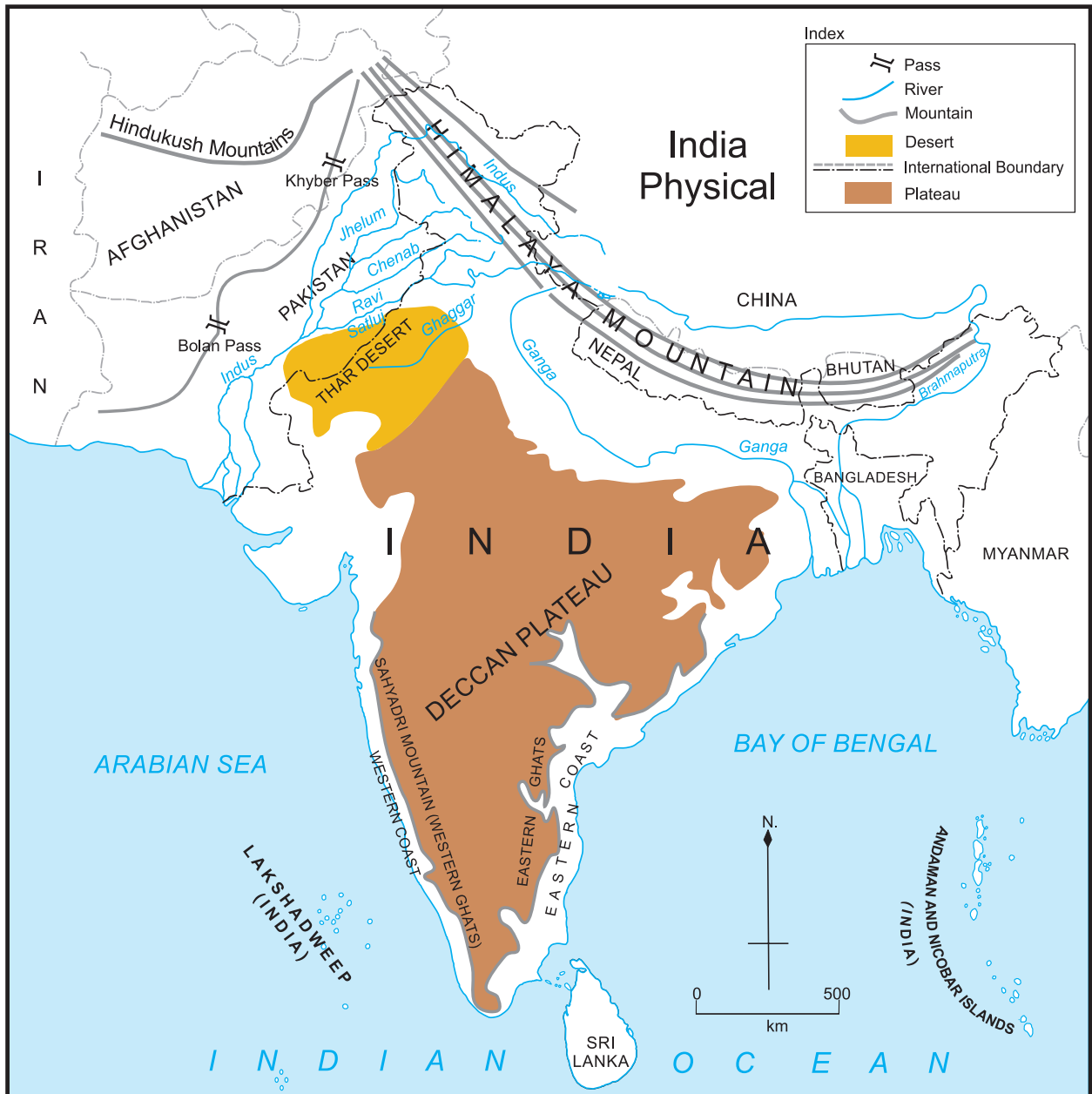
**4. The Deccan Plateau :** The region between the east and the west coast of India tapers off to the south. This region has the

Arabian Sea to its west, the Indian Ocean to its south, and the Bay of Bengal to its east. A region thus bound by the sea on three sides is called a peninsula. A major part of the Indian peninsula is occupied by the Deccan Plateau.

The mountain ranges of the Vindhya and Satpuda are located to the north of the Deccan Plateau. The Sahyadri mountain ranges are to its west. They are also known as the 'Western Ghats'. To the west of the Sahyadris is the coastal region of Konkan and Malabar. The mountains on the eastern side of the Deccan plateau are known as the 'Eastern Ghats'. Deccan Plateau has fertile land where many post-Harappan agrarian cultures flourished. Deccan Plateau was a part of the Maurya empire, the largest in ancient India. After the decline of the Maurya empire, too, several other kingdoms and smaller empires continued to flourish in this region.

**5. The coastal regions :** From the time of the Harappan civilization, ancient India had trade relations with the western countries. This trade was carried on by sea. Therefore, India had developed contact and interaction with foreign cultures and people at the sea ports. Later on, land routes came to be used for trade and transport. But the importance of sea routes did not diminish.

**6. The islands in the sea :** Andaman and Nicobar are the Indian islands in the Bay of Bengal. Lakshadweep is a group of Indian islands in the Arabian Sea. The location of these islands may have been important in ancient sea trade. The manuscript 'Periplus of the Erythrean Sea' or 'Handbook of the Red Sea' makes a mention of Indian islands. It has been written by an unknown Greek sailor.



### You can do this.

Show the following on an outline map of India.

1. The Himalaya mountain
2. The Thar Desert
3. East Coast



Andaman island

### 1.3 The Indian subcontinent

The cities of Harappa and Mohen-jo-daro are in today's Pakistan. Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India together form the region known as South Asia. Considering the expanse and significance of India in this region, it is also known as the Indian subcontinent. The Harappan

civilization had spread mainly in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent.

China and Myanmar, our neighbouring countries, are not a part of South Asia or the Indian subcontinent. However, they had cultural and trade relations with ancient India. They have an important place in the study of ancient Indian history.



#### Exercise

**1. Answer the following in one sentence.**

- (1) What is history?
- (2) Where do human settlements flourish?
- (3) What do the people in the hilly region depend on for their food?
- (4) Which is the earliest civilization in India?

**2. Answer the following questions in short.**

- (1) What does human life depend on?
- (2) What features of our surroundings form the means of our livelihood?
- (3) Which region is known as the Indian subcontinent?

**3. Give reasons.**

- (1) There is a close relation between history and geography.
- (2) People are forced to leave their settlements.

**4. Explain the difference in the human life in the hilly regions and that on the plains.**

**5. Observe the physical map of India and answer the questions based on it.**

- (1) Which mountain ranges lie in the north of India?
- (2) Which are the routes to India from the northeast?
- (3) Where do the Ganga and Brahmaputra meet?
- (4) Name the islands to the east of the Indian peninsula.
- (5) In which part of India do we see the Thar Desert?

**Activity :**

- (1) Obtain information about the lakes or reservoirs in your locality.
- (2) Show the following on a world map :
  1. The Himalaya Mountain
  2. The Silk Road
  3. Arabia

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Various costumes