

## 2.1 Early Civilizations

civilization map

Maps and  
Graphs

**Main Idea** South Asia's ancient civilizations developed around the region's river systems.

The physical geography of a place often influences its history. Good farmland and the geographic **isolation** (separation) of South Asia made the Indus and Ganges river valleys **cultural hearths**, or centers of civilization from which ideas spread. Mountains and oceans provided natural boundaries that limited invasions. Fertile soil along the rivers provided arable farmland. Two major civilizations that thrived here were the Harappans and the Aryans.

### Harappan Civilization

The first urban civilization in South Asia was the **Harappan** (huh RA puhn) civilization. It developed along the Indus River in what is now Pakistan. The land was fertile and good for farming. As a result, people formed farming villages that grew into cities. The two greatest cities of this civilization were Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. These cities were well planned and laid out in a grid pattern of straight streets. The cities also had brick houses, indoor plumbing, and a sewer system. These cities provide early examples of organized city planning that helped to support cultural growth.

The Harappan people developed advanced technologies and a system of measurement using weights and bricks that were a standard size. Among the ruins of these cities, archeologists have found stone seals with images of animals and script. Based on this evidence, scholars believe the Harappans may have developed a system of writing, but the scripts have not yet been translated.

After a period of prosperity, the Harappan civilization started to decline between 2000 and 1700 B.C. Historians believe some possible causes include the change of the Indus River's course, floods, and earthquakes.

### Vedic Period

According to many historians, around 1500 B.C., waves of new people began crossing the Hindu Kush into India. The migrants were a collection of tribes called **Aryans**, meaning "noble ones." Some historians, though, believe that other groups within South Asia began mixing with one another. The period following the height of the Harappan civilization is known as the Vedic period, named for religious texts called the Vedas. These were recorded in **Sanskrit**, the basis of many modern languages in South Asia. The Vedas are the holiest book of Hinduism, the major religion of India today.

## ANCIENT RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS



Some historians believe that people migrated to South Asia following the routes shown in the map.

Vedic society was organized into four social categories called varnas, based on one's interests. There were four groups:

- Brahmins: to teach
- Kshatriyas: to fight and rule
- Vaiśyas: to own land and trade
- Sudras: to serve

By the end of the Vedic period, another social grouping called Jatis emerged. Jatis were based on occupation and later became birth-based. Jatis grew more rigid, and Europeans later called this a **caste system**. Eventually, Indians of all religions identified with one or another of the castes. The caste system is not as prominent in modern India.

### Before You Move On

**Monitor Comprehension** Where did South Asia's ancient civilizations develop?

### FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

## LANGUAGE LAB

GeoJournal

- Compare** Read aloud the Sanskrit words in the chart. Compare them to the English words.

### SELECTED INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

Sanskrit	pitar	matar	dvi
English	father	mother	two
Greek	patêras	matros	dyo
Latin	pater	mater	duo
Spanish	padre	madre	dos

- Draw Conclusions** A language family is a group of languages that come from a common ancestor. After looking at the chart, what can you conclude about languages in the same language family?
- Interpret Time Lines** During what period of time were the Vedas written?