Name _____ Class _____ _____

Date

Lesson 1 Early Civilizations of South Asia
Lesson Summary

An Advanced Civilization

People began farming in the hills near the Indus River valley around 7000 BCE. Cities developed around 3000 BCE. Archaeologists have found remains of two great cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, in this area. They have also found evidence of more than 1,000 other towns.

This civilization used irrigation to help them grow wheat and barley. They also raised cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens. They made jewelry and cloth that they traded with other regions. They built well-planned cities with sewer systems. They also had systems of writing and of weights and measures. By around 1700 BCE the people had disappeared. The nature of their government and the reasons for the civiliation's decline remain mysteries.

Who Were the Indo-Aryans?

By 1600 BCE, another group, the Indo-Aryans, was living in India. They settled in the Ganges River valley. The period in which they flourished is called the Vedic age. The name comes from their religious hymns, called **Vedas**. From the Vedas, we know that the early Indo-Aryans lived as nomadic herders. Later, they settled in villages and farmed. The Vedas show their ideas about the meaning of life. Their Gods and Goddesses represented forces of nature such as the sky, sun, and fire.

The Maurya Empire

By the end of the Vedic age, Magadha was the strongest kingdom in India. Around 321 BCE, rebels led by Chandragupta Maurya overthrew it. Chandragupta's empire spanned much of South Asia from the Bay of Bengal to Afghanistan.

Chandragupta's grandson Asoka expanded the kingdom. He regretted the suffering he caused as a result of a war he waged against the kingdom of Kalinga. As a result, he started to follow Buddhist principles. He ruled based on ahimsa, or the belief that one should not hurt any living thing. He focused on trying to help his people. He also showed open-mindedness toward people with different beliefs and customs. Asoka worked to spread Buddhism. After Asoka's death, the Maurya empire declined.

The Gupta Empire

A social structure began to develop in ancient India and evolved over many years. The system was based on **caste**, a fixed, social class that people entered when they were born. Groupings were usually based on the work a person did. People usually did not mix with people in other castes. One group that developed later, the Dalits, were considered below the other castes. They suffered unfair treatment.

After the Maurya empire fell, India broke into many small kingdoms. Chandra Gupta I and his successors then united northern India. Under the Gupta dynasty, the empire grew. Most of India enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity. The last Gupta ruler died around the year 540.

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The Guptas increased trade with China, Southeast Asia, and Europe. Persian and Greek learning came into the region. This led to advances in art, literature, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and metalworking. The Gupta rulers left most decisions in the hands of governors and local councils. Thus, many people living in the Gupta empire had certain rights.

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