Folk dancers from Himachal Pradesh in the northwest part of India.
Early History

The Indus Valley Civilizations

The earliest civilizations on the Indian subcontinent arose in the period between 3000 and 1500 B.C. These civilizations were located in the Indus Valley of the northwest in what is now Pakistan. The most important cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, were among the most skillfully designed cities in the ancient world. The people who settled there brought with them bronze weapons and the idea of living in cities, both of which may have been borrowed from Middle Eastern peoples.

Although 400 miles apart, these two cities were connected by a navigable (able to sail on) river, the Indus. Discoveries by archaeologists and anthropologists have revealed that the Harappan civilization spread over 1,000 miles.

In each city, a fort was built for protection. Buildings were made of brick. Streets were wide, and houses were comfortable. There appears to have been plenty of water, and many families had their own wells. Drainpipes were used to carry wastewater away from the city.

An efficient irrigation system for farming was built. This suggests that these early Indus Valley civilizations had a well-organized system of government. The farmers grew wheat, rice, peas, barley, and cotton. They may have been the first people to raise cotton, which was used to make clothing. Farmers also raised cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens, and camels. Craftsmen used copper and brass as well as gold and silver. Elephants were used for transportation and heavy work.

Life centered around trade. The people sailed the Indus River and along the coasts of the Arabian Sea to the Persian Gulf to trade with the faraway cities of Mesopotamia.

No written records of the Harappan culture have been discovered. Although a system of pictorial writing was developed in the city of Mohenjo-Daro, no one has been able to understand what was written. Harappan merchants rolled carved soapstone seals across soft clay to identify property or to sign contracts. These seals may suggest that other Indus Valley people also developed a form of pictographic writing.

Summary of Achievements of the Indus Valley Civilizations

1. They developed the idea of living in cities.
2. They developed the ability to shape cups and bowls on a potter’s wheel and then glazed, baked, and decorated the pottery.
3. They used wheeled carts pulled by bullocks (large cattle).
4. Artisans made wooden furniture that was often decorated with inlays of bone, shell, and ivory.
5. Craftsmen made jewelry and other ornaments from gold, silver, copper, bronze, and a reddish clay called terra cotta.
6. Smiths worked copper and bronze to make weapons such as spears and other implements such as fishhooks.
7. Harappan traders used a uniform system of weights and measures to ensure fair trade practices.
8. A pictographic written language may have been developed.
9. Chess, a game for two players, originated in Harappa. Its aim was to capture an enemy king by eliminating his army and allies.
10. Several ancient Indian settlements have been discovered along the northeast coast of the Arabian Sea. These settlements probably began as trading posts for Indus Val-
The Decline of the Indus Valley Civilizations

1. The city of Mohenjo-Daro ("the place of the dead") seems to have been slowly over run by mud from a nearby lake. This was probably caused by the earth's shifting surface. The idea that mud covered the city is based on the discovery that houses were repeatedly rebuilt on higher and higher platforms as mud levels rose.

2. Evidence has been found that the mineral salts in the underground water had a destructive effect on the baked bricks of Mohenjo-Daro.

3. A change in the salt content of the underground water could have made agricultural production impossible.

4. There is evidence of major earthquakes and flooding in the period around 1700 B.C. A major earthquake may have blocked the Indus River and caused flooding of Mohenjo-Daro and other cities in the Sind Plain.

5. Beginning round 1500 B.C., Aryan people (see the following section) from the Iranian plateau invaded the Indus Valley. A series of massive attacks by these invaders finally destroyed what was left of the Indus River civilizations in the Sind Valley and at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.

The Aryans Invade India

The Aryans were taller and lighter-skinned than the earlier Indus Valley peoples. The Aryans built no cities, and had no art, architecture, or written language. They were nomadic herders who measured their wealth in livestock. Even their word for "war" meant, in Sanskrit, "a desire for more cows."

When the Aryans left their homes in central Asia in search of better land to graze their sheep, the fertile valley of the Indus attracted them. The Aryans conquered the Dravidians (the original people of India). As they advanced eastward into the Ganges River plain, the Dravidians fled southward.

The Aryan tribes decided to settle in India. Although they destroyed the Harappan civilization and culture, they were greatly influenced by it. They became farmers, finding it pleasant to live in India after the hardships they had suffered on the dry plains of what is now southern Russia. In poetry and song they expressed their thanksgiving. In their new surroundings they retained the memories of their conquests, their ideas about human beings and life, and the rituals and ceremonies in the Vedas.

The blending of the Harappan and Aryan cultures was the basis for the development of Indian civilization. Between 1500 and 500 B.C. the Aryans developed the main characteristics of what came to be the Hindu way of life. During this thousand-year period many Aryan tribes moved into northern India. Gradually, small kingdoms began to appear. Each kingdom was ruled by a prince called a rajah. Although the Aryans brought new ideas into India, they also became, in some ways, like the people who already lived there.

On the other hand, Aryan language, literature, ideas about government, laws and social classes, as well as religious traditions, became a vital part of Indian life. The Aryan heritage had far-reaching effects on the historical, cultural, and social development of India.

Among the contributions of the Aryans was the Indo-European language called Sanskrit. The religious literature you have already read about—the Vedas—was passed down
from generation to generation orally in Sanskrit. Many Sanskrit words are similar to English words having the same meanings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit Words</th>
<th>English Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>matr</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhrata</td>
<td>brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>svasir</td>
<td>sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duhita</td>
<td>daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sunu</td>
<td>son</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sanskrit, you will recall, is still spoken and written by upper-class Indians.

Aryan society was divided into three social classes: noble warriors, priests, and the common people, who took care of the cattle. The Dravidians, who were conquered by the Aryans, became a fourth class, which was not considered equal to the first three.

A member of the warrior class was chosen to be the rajah or chief. He and a chosen group of nobles were in charge of Aryan affairs. This class system, unlike the Hindu caste system, was flexible since people could intermarry and move from class to class.

Male and female roles were clearly defined. Men were fighters and herders. Women raised crops, wove cloth, ground grain, and took care of the children. Although women were not permitted to help decide tribal policy, they did have the right to choose their husbands and had a voice in household matters.

Over a period of 1,000 years, many changes in Aryan society took place. Rules and traditions began to control the behavior of each social class. Class structure became stricter and movement from one social class to another ended. As you have read, a strict caste system developed with Brahmans (priests) at the top. A Kashatriya class of warrior-nobles came next, followed by a Vaishya class made up of the common people (the merchants, traders, artisans, farmers, and herders). The fourth and lowest class was the Sudras, the descendants of the conquered Dravidians, who were not even considered Aryans. They were slaves, servants, unskilled workers, and tenant farmers.

As the Aryans settled down, they established small kingdoms. In each one, the rajah soon became a hereditary king, not simply a leader chosen from the warrior class. The Aryans established kingdoms from the Indus Valley eastward to the shores of the Bay of Bengal. They made northern India their home and spread Aryan culture southward onto the Deccan Plateau in central India.

The Aryan conquest had forced many Dravidians onto the Deccan Plateau and into the extreme south of the Indian Peninsula. In the southern part of India the Dravidians developed languages, customs, and traditions very different from those of the Aryans in the north. As a result, geography and historical developments created two very different Indias. These differences between North India and South India still exist today.

The Persians Invade India

The Persians invaded India in the 6th century B.C. They conquered the Indus River valley and parts of modern West Punjab. Trade developed between India and Persia, and some Indian soldiers fought alongside the Persians when Persia invaded Greece in the 5th century B.C. The written Sanskrit language used by most educated Indians is related to written Persian, and there are many Persian words in Sanskrit.
The Greeks Invade India

In 326 B.C., a Greek king, Alexander the Great, who was determined to conquer the world, appeared in India on the banks of the Indus. His men, far from home, tired, and afraid of the unknown that lay before them, refused to go on.

The Greek conquest of India was brief. Greek culture had little impact on India, except for its influence on Indian art. Early Buddhist art used no human image of Buddha. After the Greek invasion of India, however, sculptors influenced by Greek and Roman art created the first Buddha in human form. This Greco/Roman-style Buddha was the model for later works by Indian, Chinese, and Japanese artists.

The Maurya Empire

An important result of the Greek invasion was its influence on a young Indian leader, Chandragupta Maurya. When Alexander conquered India, he destroyed the small kingdoms and republics in the northwest. In 322 B.C., Chandragupta took possession of the throne of Magadha in northeastern India. This area, rich in timber and animals, served as a base for Chandragupta’s expansion to the northwest when Alexander left. Magadha became wealthy and was the most powerful kingdom on the Ganges plain. It formed the center of the Mauryan Empire, which spread into the Indus Valley and the Punjab.

The great accomplishment of the Mauryas was the establishment of good and stable government. Chandragupta set up a postal system, developed roads, and built an extensive irrigation system. Business and trade flourished, and an army of 700,000 soldiers maintained order.

The Wise Rule of Asoka

Great as Chandragupta was, his grandson Asoka was even greater. Asoka, who ruled from about 273 to 232 B.C., is thought by many to have been the greatest king India ever had, and one of the greatest rulers who has ever lived. He is remembered and respected most because, although a powerful and mighty warrior, he did not use force to rule or to extend his kingdom. As a ruler, he followed the principles of Buddhism, and he commanded his officials to be just and considerate.

Under Asoka, the Maurya Empire spread south through the Deccan Plateau to the lands of the Tamils in the extreme south, and west to the Gondhara region near the Persian border and to the Hindu Kush Mountains.

The Rise and Fall of Buddhism

As the Hindu religion developed over the years, many Indians did not approve of the changes that had taken place within it. They felt that the religion had too many ceremonies that did little to increase the goodness of the people. These ceremonies served only to increase the powers of the Brahmans (priests). Moreover, many of the Sudras class and the untouchables were unhappy with the misery and poverty and their lives.

One who disapproved strongly was Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 B.C.), a prince of a kingdom near the Himalayas in North India. According to one legend, when he was nearly 30 years old, Gautama was given four signs. As he walked in the palace grounds, he saw
three men: one very old, one ill and in pain, and one dead. Gautama was very troubled by these signs of age, pain, and death. Then he saw a fourth man—a wandering holy man—and at that moment he realized that this was the way of life he had to follow. Other stories say Gautama discovered the misery and poverty of his people when he made secret trips throughout his kingdom.

Whatever the reason, Gautama left the palace, his easy life, and his wife and son to search for the answer to the question that was troubling him: Why do people have to suffer from pain and sorrow? At first, Gautama tried traditional Hindu ways to find the answer to the question. He studied with Hindu teachers and lived alone in the forest as a hermit. He fasted and denied himself all comforts so that his mind would be free to find the answer.

Then one day, as he meditated (engaged in deep thought) under a sacred fig tree, ideas miraculously began to come to him. After 49 days of meditating, the answer to the question became clear. He had become the Buddha—"the Enlightened One"—and Buddhism was born.

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path

The basis of Gautama’s belief was the “Four Noble Truths of Stopping Sorrow”:

1. Sorrow and suffering are part of all life.
2. People suffer because they desire things they cannot have.
3. The way to escape suffering is to end desire, to stop wanting, and to reach a stage of not wanting.
4. To end desire, one should follow the “middle way—the paths that avoid the extremes of too much pleasure and desire as well as too much refusal to have pleasure and desire.” There is an Eightfold Path to the middle way:
   - Right understanding
   - Right means of earning a living
   - Right purpose
   - Right effort
   - Right speech
   - Right awareness
   - Right conduct
   - Right meditation

These teachings challenged basic Hindu beliefs. Buddhism places more importance on how one lives than on one’s caste or class. Among Buddhists today, there is no caste system.

Rules for Right Living

Buddhists believe that there are four Rules for Right Living:

1. Hatred is never ended by hatred; hatred is ended by love.
2. People should overcome anger by love.
3. People should overcome evil by goodness.
4. Everyone trembles at punishment; everyone loves life.

Buddhism under Asoka

The people of India were ready to accept a new religion and a new set of ideals. The rule of the Brahmans (priests of the Veda) was harsh and unfair. Many Indians were unhappy, and opposition grew. Buddhist priests told the people that to gain knowledge and to be just, ethical, and compassionate was the best way to live. They spoke against the caste system and the complicated rites that the Brahmans followed.

Asoka sent people all over India to spread Buddhist ideas. Indians by the millions accepted the teachings of Buddha. After the death of Asoka, however, there were many changes in Buddhism. The religion survived and grew stronger in many parts of Asia, but in India it almost disappeared. Today, there are only about 1 million Buddhists in India.

Reasons for the Fall of Buddhism

The fall of Buddhism had many causes. Hinduism was broad and tolerant, and it accepted many of the teachings of the Buddha. Also, Buddhists in India were quite willing to compromise with the beliefs and customs of Hinduism. In fact, Indian Buddhism eventually
became so much like Hinduism that it was regarded as a part of Hinduism. The final blow to Buddhism in India was delivered by the Muslims. Pushing into India from the 8th century on, they destroyed the great Buddhist monasteries, burned the libraries, and killed the monks. Most of the monks who survived left India, and Buddhism was never again important there.

**Jainism**

Another attempt to reform the Hindu religion was the result of the work of Mahavira ("Great Hero") who lived at about the same time as Gautama, the Buddha. Mahavira believed in many of the same things as Buddha. However, he felt that strict discipline and self-denial were the only ways to purify the soul.

Jains, as his followers call themselves, do not have gods and do not pray. They do not believe in violence. **Ahimsa**, or nonviolence, is their central belief. They do not fight back if attacked. They do not eat meat or do farm work because they believe that farming the soil kills plant and animal life.

Jainism never became a very important religion in India or elsewhere. (Can you think of reasons why this was so?) However, the important concept of ahimsa was adopted by the Buddhists, and in the 20th century Ahimsa became the cornerstone of the Congress Party's struggle for independence under Mohandas K. Gandhi.

**The Dravidian Tamils**

Soon after the death of Asoka, the Maurya Empire of North India began to fall apart. For the next 600 years invaders swept over the Indian Plains. In time, the invaders were either driven out or became Hindus. Meanwhile, the Deccan Plateau and South India were entering the mainstream of Indian history. People of these regions made important contributions to Hinduism.

The southern area was called the Tamil country, after the main Dravidian language in use there. The people of the Tamil country began to combine the Hindu traditions of the Aryans with their own Dravidian folklore to produce some of India’s finest poetry, epics, and music.

The Dravidaiduals who had been pursued to the south during the Aryan invasion, were different from the Aryans in appearance and language. The Dravidian languages, which are still spoken in South India and Sri Lanka (Ceylon), are not Indo-European; in fact, they are unlike any other languages in the world. Today, the main Dravidian language is Tamil.

**The Importance of Trade**

The Dravidian Tamils were sailors who traded and conquered. Trade was an important part of life in India in the last 600 years B.C. Important trade routes were developed to link India with western Asia and the Mediterranean world. In the Deccan and South India, trade increased as traders from China and Arabia visited Indian ports. Sea trade flourished, and peninsular India, long overshadowed by the states of the north, began to gain in influence and power.

By about the 1st century A.D. there was a profitable trade from Tamil ports in South India to China, Egypt, and parts of the Roman Empire. The Tamils carried cargoes of
spices, jewels, perfumes, textiles, and animals for trade in the Asian and Roman world. In return, they received gold from Rome and silk textiles and porcelain from China.

India's contacts with Southeast Asia developed as a direct result of its trade with the West. Southeast Asian lands were largely unsettled and undeveloped. However, they produced spices, which were much in demand in the West. Indian traders sailed to various parts of Southeast Asia, and many settled there. The Indians brought their customs and their religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, to Southeast Asia.

In North India, the period of invasions came to an end when the Gupta family, led by another Chandragupta, united the kingdoms of the north. The Guptas ruled for over 200 years (A.D. 320–550), a period of stable government and great accomplishment. Indian scholars, writers, and artists distinguished themselves by producing masterpieces of art, literature, and architecture.

Gupta Accomplishments

Mathematics

In the field of mathematics, the Indians were the actual developers of so-called Arabic numerals. Arab sailors, merchants, and traders learned of this Indian system of numbers and carried it to the Middle East and then to Europe. The idea of zero, the idea of infinity, and a decimal system were also developed by Indian mathematicians. The value of \( \pi \) was determined to be 3.1416.

Medicine

In medicine, Gupta India was far advanced. Indian physicians had learned to diagnose and treat many ailments. Surgery was quite sophisticated; surgeons set broken bones, performed Caesarean sections, and used plastic surgery to repair mutilations. In addition, Indian doctors were aware of an important fact not understood by Western physicians until modern times—that cleanliness can prevent infection.

Literature

Kalidasa was the greatest of the poets and playwrights of the period. In fact, some of his plays are still performed in India and in other countries. His drama \( \text{Sakuntala} \), a love story about a king and his beautiful bride, is available in English. The early Hindu storytellers delighted in fairy tales, folklore, and animated fables. In Gupta times, many of these tales were gathered into a collection that passed eventually, by way of the Arabs, into European literature. In this way, many modern European writers are indebted to the Hindus for the forms or plots of their tales.

Art and Architecture

The Guptas spent large sums of money on the building of temples. Painters and sculptors were well rewarded for their work. Gupta palaces were richly decorated and were always showplaces. Nearly all the art and architecture was of a religious nature.

The peak of Gupta art and architecture was reached in the Deccan. The magnificent cave temples at Ajanta and Ellora took nearly 1,000 years to build. All were cut out of solid rock, and the outside walls were decorated with sculptured figures, columns, and fresco paintings. South India has some of the finest freestanding temples in the world.

Influence of the Guptas

The Guptas left a great heritage:

1. Sanskrit was the language of the Guptas. The influence of Sanskrit culture gave India a cultural unity.

396 The Subcontinent of India and South Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh)