

◀ Boatmen glide along the Ganges River, which flows across northern India.

Geography and the Early Settlement of India

13.1 Introduction

In Unit 2, you explored the world of the ancient Egyptians, the Hebrews, and the people of Kush. In this unit, you will learn about the civilization of ancient India.

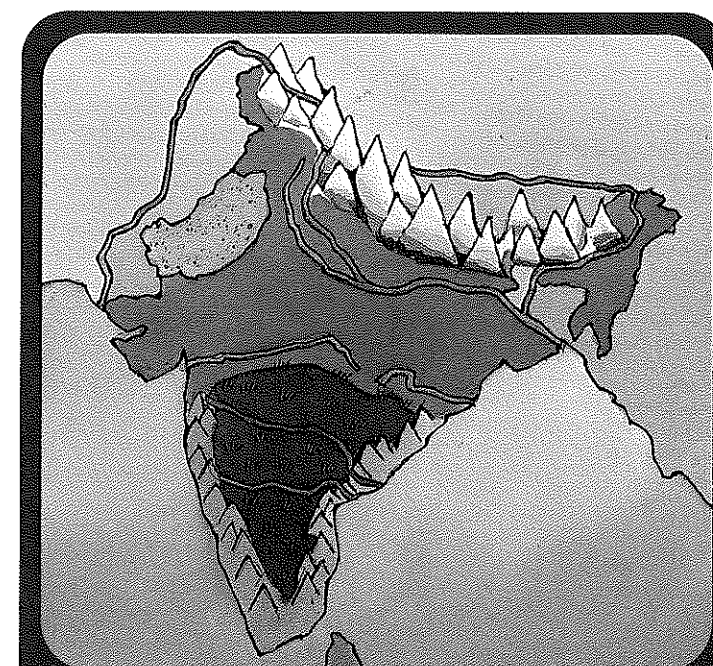
India is a **subcontinent** of Asia. If you look at a map of India, you can see that it is attached to the continent of Asia, but surrounded on three sides by water.

Early walled towns appeared on the Indian subcontinent in about 2500 B.C.E. Over the next 2,000 years, a unique civilization developed in India.

According to an ancient Indian story, a river god and goddess once lived in the snow-covered Himalayas, a mountain range north of the valleys. One day, they decided to race down the mountains to the plains below. The goddess sped straight down and won the race. But her joy soon turned to worry. Where was the river god?

The river god had slowed down to admire the snowcapped mountains and the rich brown earth in the valleys. In time, he flowed down to meet his beloved goddess. The two rivers became one, joined forever on India's plains. The rivers made the land good for farming.

In this chapter, you will learn about India's rivers and other **physical features**. You'll explore eight key features and their effects on the settlement of India.



Use this map as a graphic organizer to learn how India's physical features created opportunities for settlement.

monsoon a strong wind that brings heavy rain to southern Asia in the summer

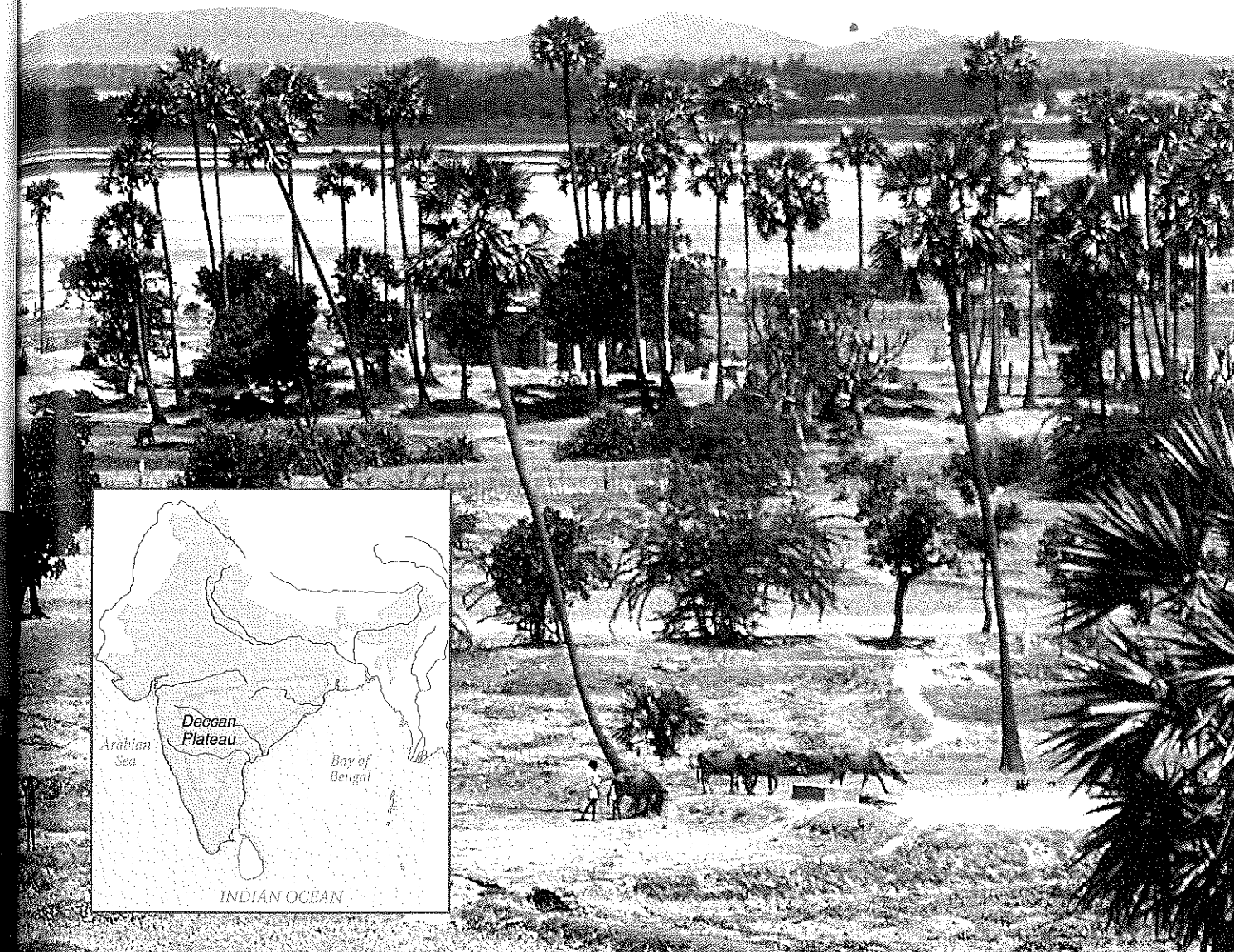
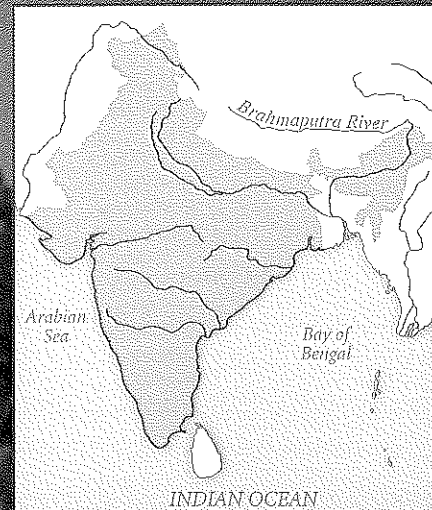
A typical southern town along the Brahmaputra River receives between 70 and 150 inches of rain a year. The heaviest rainfall occurs during the southwest monsoon between June and October. Temperatures along the river range from 45°F to 85°F.

13.2 Brahmaputra River

Our exploration of India begins with the Brahmaputra River. This river starts high up in the Himalayas. From there, it winds through snowcapped mountains and narrow canyons. The water is clear and cold as it rushes over the sharp rocks.

The river becomes slower and deeper as it moves into its valley. Each summer, heavy monsoon rains add water to this part of the river. A **monsoon** is a large wind that often brings lots of rain. The heavy rains cause the river to overflow its banks. As it overflows, the river leaves the rich minerals it has carried down from the Himalayas in the earth of the valley.

Eventually, the river joins another river, the Ganges, on the plains. Where the two rivers meet, the land is very fertile (good for farming).



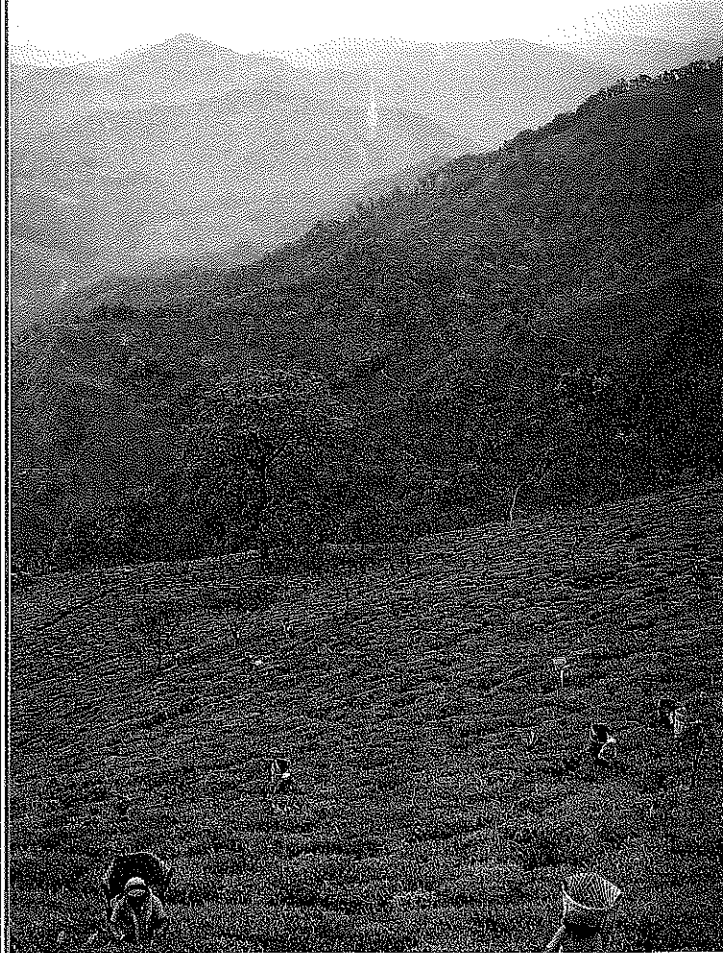
13.3 Deccan Plateau

The Deccan Plateau is a triangle-shaped area between two mountain ranges in southern India. A **plateau** is an elevated, or raised, area of land that is flatter than a mountain. The Deccan Plateau has different kinds of land. In the flatter parts, large granite rocks formed by volcanoes cover the land. These rocks are among the world's oldest, dating back more than 600 million years. The hillier parts of the plateau have thin forests and low, scrubby bushes.

The plateau is fairly dry. There are a few rivers, but the monsoon rains provide most of the water. The soil on the plateau is black, yellow, or red. The black soil is rich in iron and good for growing cotton. The yellow and red soils are missing important minerals. Farmers have a hard time growing plants in them.

A typical town in the Deccan Plateau receives about 30 inches of rain a year. The heaviest rainfall occurs during the southwest monsoon between June and October. Temperatures on the plateau range from 65°F to 100°F.

plateau a flat area of land that is elevated, or raised, above the land around it



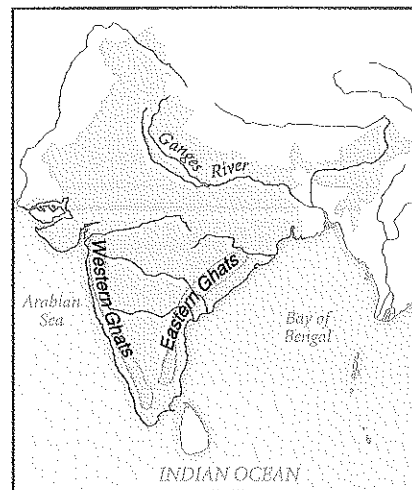
13.4 Eastern and Western Ghats

The Eastern and Western Ghats are long mountain chains near the coasts of India. When seen from above, they form a large V. The Deccan Plateau stretches between these two mountain ranges.

The Western Ghats are higher than the Eastern Ghats. They have steep slopes, narrow valleys, thick hardwood forests, and extremely heavy rains. The wet climate encourages the growth of tropical plants.

The Eastern Ghats are not as wet as the Western Ghats. Several rivers flow through these green mountains, which are sprinkled with hardwood trees. The rivers rarely flood, but they are not safe for travel. They move very fast, contain many rocks, and often plunge suddenly over cliffs.

Parts of the Ghats receive 100 or more inches of rain a year. Temperatures range from 60°F to 90°F.



Towns along the Ganges receive 25 to 60 inches of rain a year. Temperatures in the Ganges plains range from 55°F to 90°F.

13.5 Ganges River

The Ganges River flows across most of northern India. It starts in the Himalaya Mountains. The river traces its way south through ice, rocks, and magnificent mountains and valleys.

The river carries sediment (bits of earth and sand) from the Himalayas to the northern plains. As the river passes through the plains, it leaves the rich sediment behind. As a result, the northern plains contain some of the most fertile farmland in the world.

The Ganges River plains have a good water supply from melting ice carried down from the Himalayas. During the rainy season, the river can flood and destroy crops planted along its banks.



13.6 Himalaya Mountains

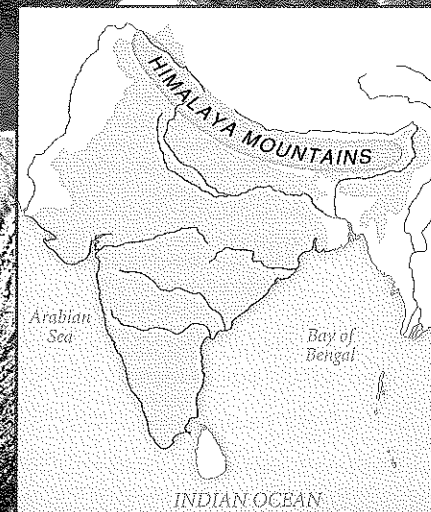
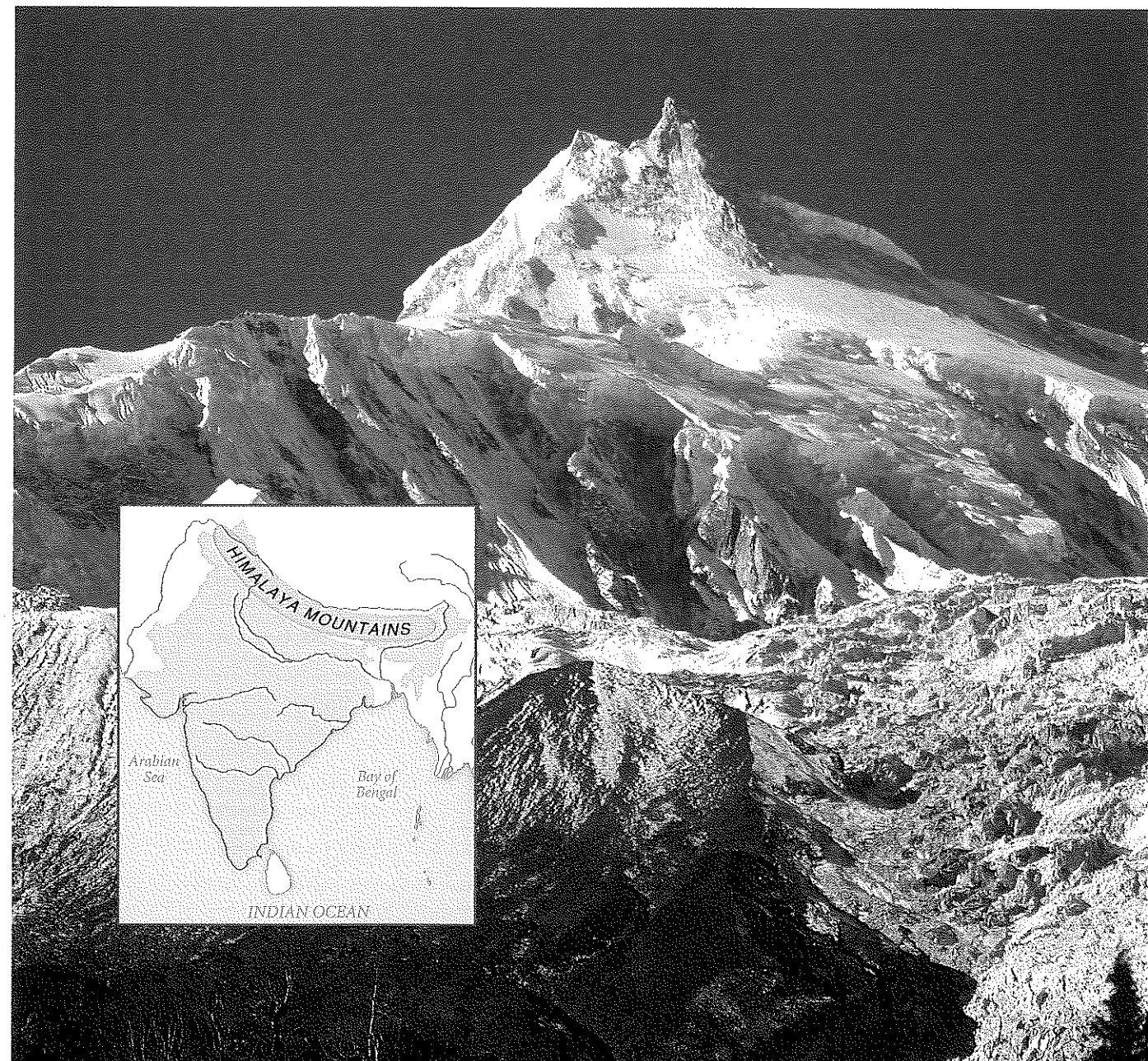
The Himalayas are located along India's northern border. They are the highest mountain range in the world. Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain, is part of the Himalayas. It reaches five and a half miles into the sky. The mountains form a natural border between the Indian subcontinent and most of the rest of Asia.

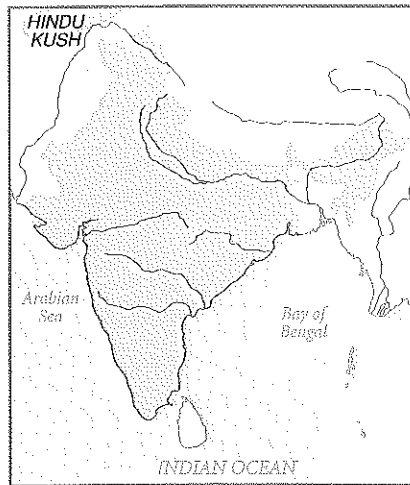
The Himalayas live up to their name, which means "home of snows." The highest peaks are always covered in snow and ice. Fierce storms can dump 10 feet of snow on the area at one time. The water from the range's **glaciers** (ice fields) feed northern India's major rivers.

Underneath the Himalaya Mountains, the earth is always moving. This movement causes Mount Everest to rise slightly every year. It also makes earthquakes and landslides common in the area.

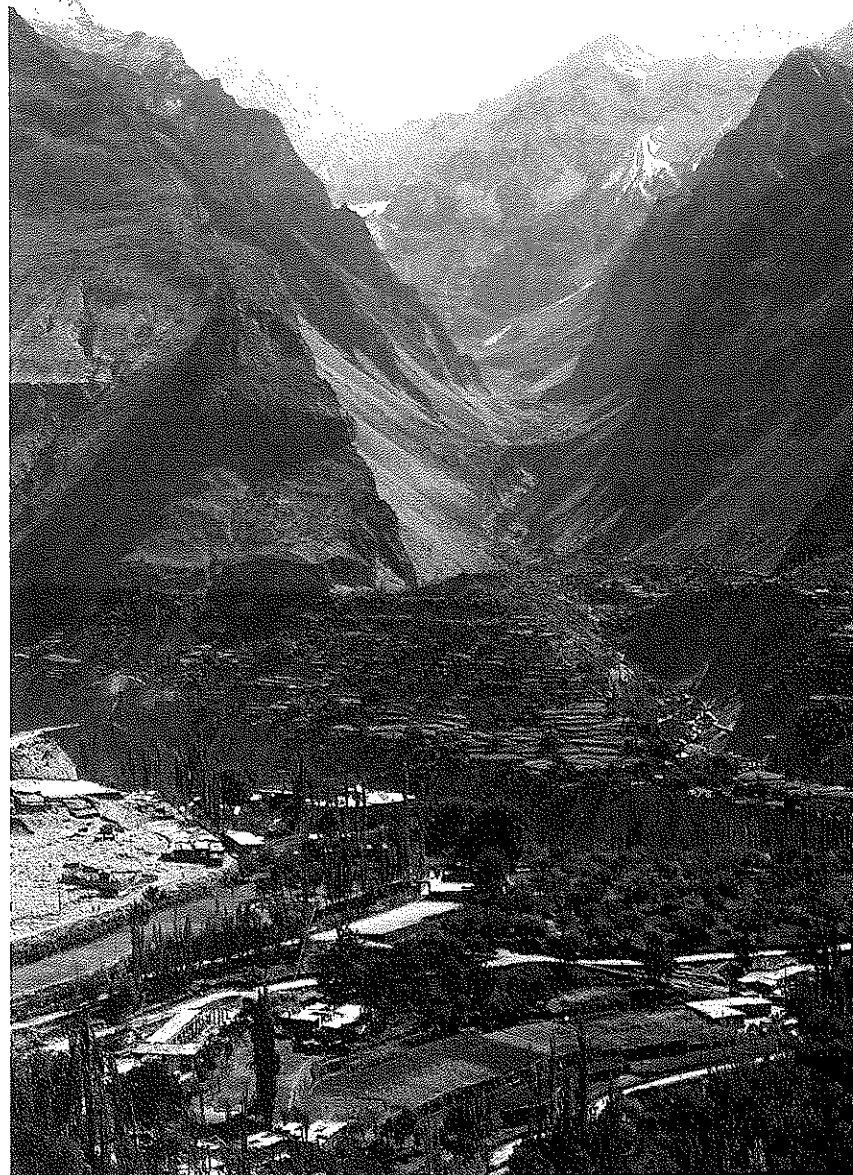
glacier a huge mass of ice that slowly slides over a land area

The upper peaks of the Himalayas receive about 20 inches of snow a year. The heaviest snowfall occurs during the southwest monsoon between June and October. Temperatures on the highest peaks never rise above freezing (32°F) and can go as low as -76°F.





The Hindu Kush mountain range receives about 15 inches of rain and snow a year. Weather and seasons vary greatly across the range. Temperatures in the Hindu Kush vary from about 25°F to 75°F.



13.7 Hindu Kush Mountains

The Hindu Kush mountains form a fierce barrier between India and present-day Afghanistan. This mountain range is not as tall as the Himalayas, but it is still one of the highest in the world. Some of its peaks are almost 5 miles high. Many parts of the mountain range are unlivable. Snow and ice permanently cover the steep slopes and peaks.

The Khyber Pass is a 28-mile-long gap between the mountains. It connects central Asia to the Indian subcontinent. For thousands of years, traders used the pass to enter the Indus River valley. Invaders also used the pass, although many died in the mountains' unforgiving landscape.

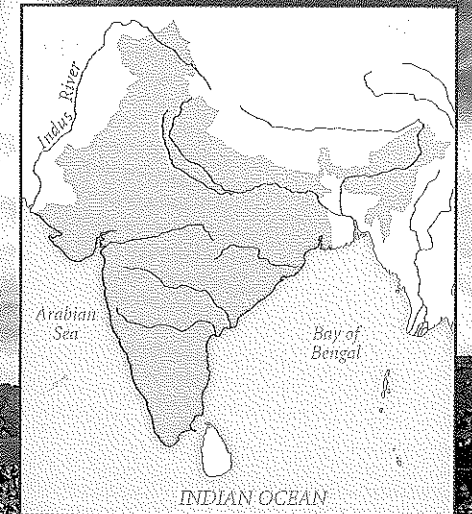
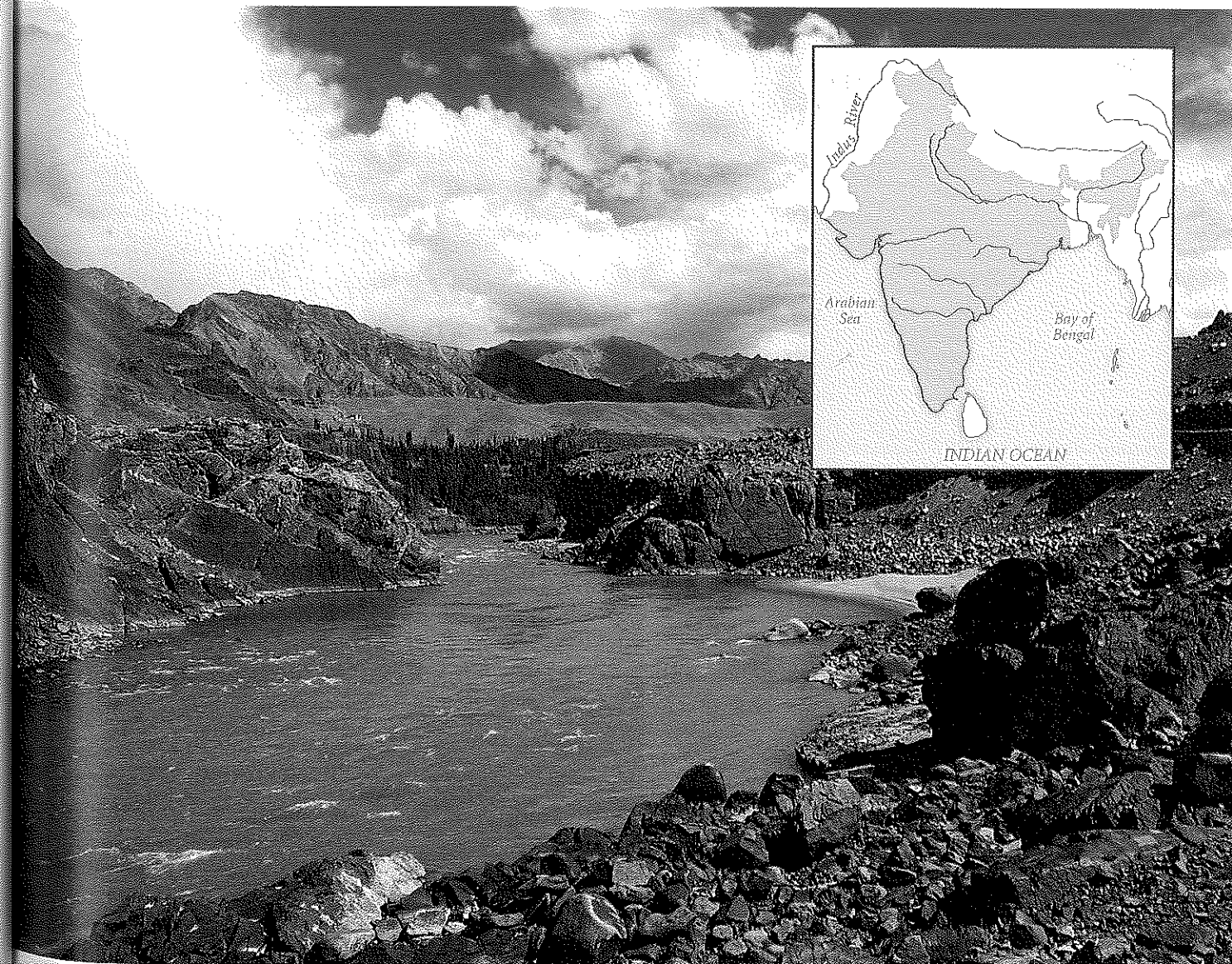
13.8 Indus River

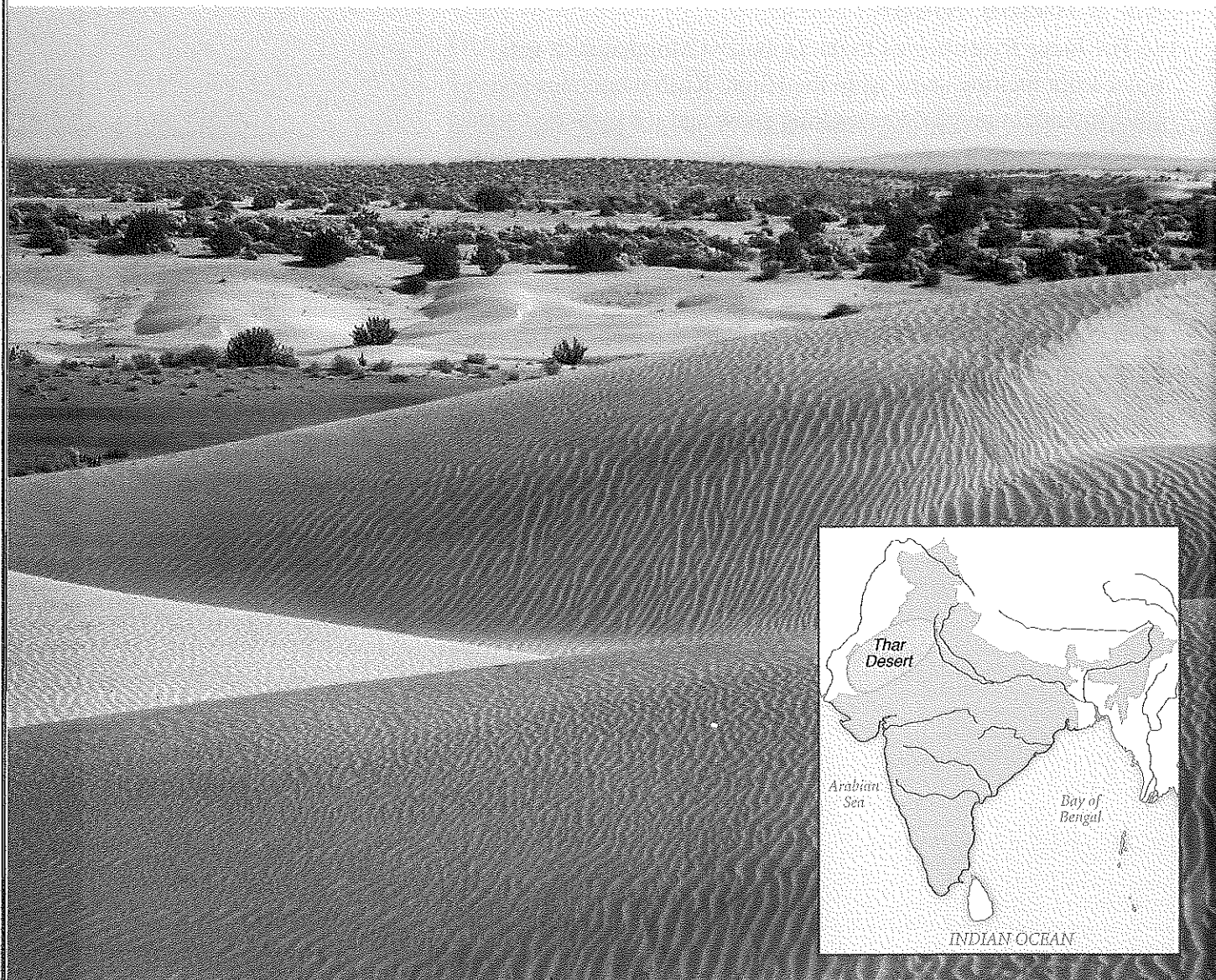
The Indus River begins in the Himalaya Mountains. It gets water from melting snow from the Hindu Kush mountains and other mountain ranges. The melting snow and ice from the mountains keep the river's water level high. Eventually, the river flows through what is now the country of Pakistan and empties into the Arabian Sea.

In addition, the Indus River valley contains some of the best farmland in the world. Like the Ganges, the Indus carries sediment from the mountains to the plains. The sediment leaves the surrounding soil rich and fertile.

The Indus River has often been compared to Egypt's Nile River. Like the Nile, the Indus is an important source of water for the farmland that lies along its banks.

Towns along the Indus River receive from 5 to 20 inches of rain a year. The heaviest rainfall occurs during the southwest monsoon between June and October. Temperatures in the Indus River valley range from 65°F to 90°F.





The Thar Desert receives about 4 to 20 inches of rain a year. The heaviest rainfall occurs during the southwest monsoon between June and October. Temperatures in the desert range from 45°F to 120°F.

13.9 Thar Desert

The massive Thar Desert in northern India is mostly sand and stone. Huge, rolling sand dunes stretch for hundreds of miles. The landscape is littered with rocks. There is very little plant life except for grass and low, hardy shrubs. Most of the time, the heat is unbearable.

Water is a precious resource in the desert. There is evidence of dried-up riverbeds near the desert's borders, but there are no rivers now. Rain is rare, although the monsoons occasionally bring a soothing storm. The dry conditions make dust storms common.

A variety of animals and birds make their home in the desert. There are more than 45 kinds of lizards and snakes. Gazelles lope across the sand. Birds include quail, ducks, and geese.

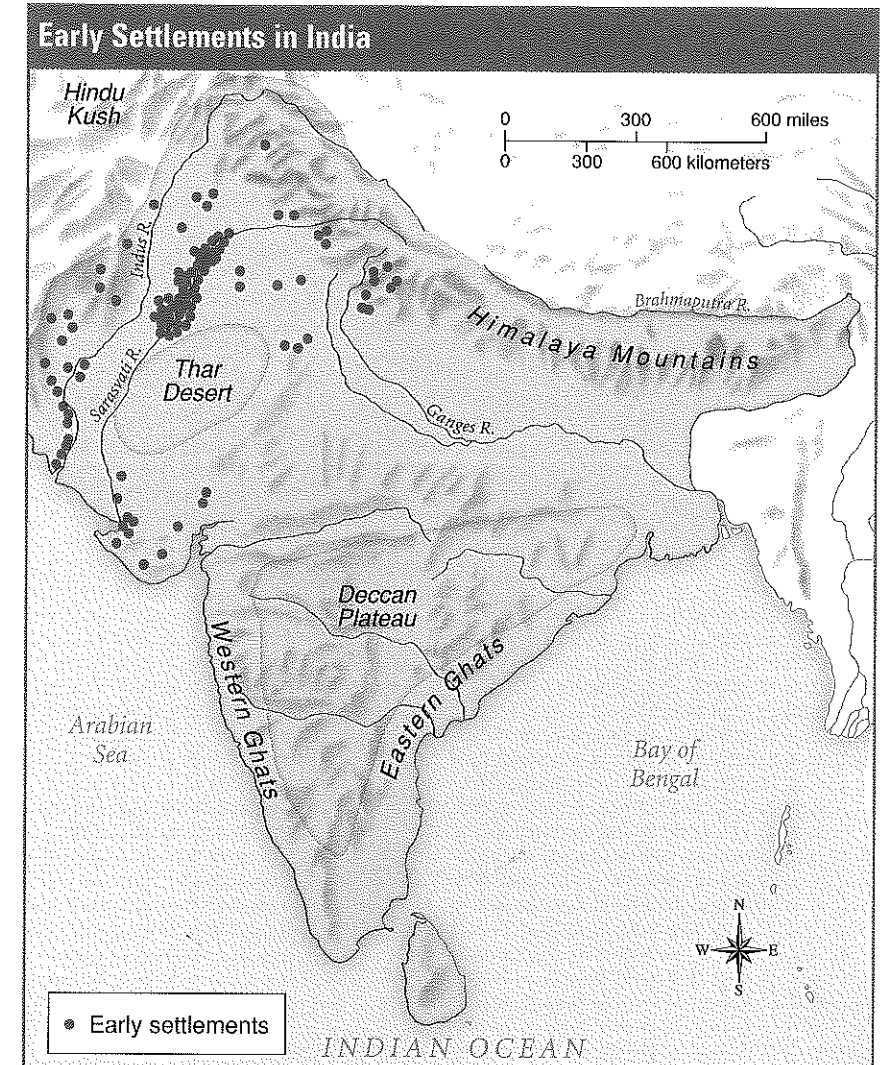
13.10 Early Settlements in India

Like many ancient peoples, the first people in India settled by rivers. The rivers provided plenty of water. The fertile soil was ideal for farming. The rivers could also be used for travel and trade.

India's early townspeople lived along the Indus River and the ancient Sarasvati River. The Sarasvati used to run through what is now the Thar Desert. Scientists believe the river dried up around 1900 B.C.E. Over time, the area became a hot, dry desert.

Farming settlements sprang up in the Indus-Sarasvati region as early as 6500 B.C.E. By 5000 B.C.E., people had also settled near the Ganges River. When the Sarasvati River dried up, the ancient Indians continued to settle along the Ganges.

By 2500 B.C.E., there were walled settlements near the Indus and Sarasvati Rivers. You'll learn more about this ancient civilization in the next chapter.



13.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you explored eight physical features of the Indian subcontinent. You learned that India has a varied landscape. It contains high mountains, a large plateau, a desert, and many rivers.

India's early settlers farmed in the fertile river valleys. In time, walled settlements were built. This was the start of civilization in India.

What was life like for people in ancient India? In the next chapter, you will go on an archeological dig to unearth the ancient Indian city of Mohenjodaro.