

## ANCIENT INDIA - PHYSICAL

The ancient period of Indian history may be broadly subdivided into prehistoric, proto-historic and historic periods. Prehistoric period is the age of Paleolithic and Neolithic men (100,000 BC approximately). We know hardly anything about this period save the meager evidence supplied by the cave drawings and stone implements. This period is popularly known as the "Stone Age".

Proto-historic age corresponds with the Indus valley civilization period (3000 to 2500 BC). The era is also known as the Copper Age. Bronze implements of an early date have been found in India along with those of copper, but it does not appear that bronze was ever generally used in India as a replacement of copper. With the copper and iron ages, we enter the limits of the historic period which presumably began with the advent of the Aryans around fifteenth and fourteenth century BC. The written records as well as relics help to build a historical account of this period and thereafter. The Vedas throw light on the political, social and economic conditions of the Aryans. The Puranas, the Buddhist Jatakas, the Jain Sutras are valuable sources for the history of sixth century BC. Also, the accounts left by foreign travelers - like description of kingdoms, citizens, social practices, etc, are valuable sources for tracing ancient history. The principal geographical divisions, mountains, rivers, peaks and important sites during 600 BC have been depicted here.

The era of 600 BC has been selected for mapping because of two reasons. First, by this time, Aryan civilization had well spread not only over the Ganga-Yamuna plain (Madhya Desa) but further eastward up to Bengal and towards south it crossed the Vindhyas and penetrated in Deccan. Secondly, this period witnessed a series of movements against the Brahminical religion, culture and the existing social system. Of the protesting religions, Jainism and Buddhism became popular amongst the exploited downtrodden millions.

The impact of Buddhism spread steadily not only all over India but across the sea and oceans as well. Buddhism has been considered by the historians as the "greatest gift of Indian civilization to the mankind". If Buddhism would not arise, the civilization of India, China, Japan, Korea and Cambodia would have been much different. Hence, the sixth century BC is considered as a turning point in the history of Indian civilization and culture. As such, the geographical features of this period have been taken up as the prime theme of this map.

### Concept of India

Bounded on the north by chains of mountains and on other three sides by seas and ocean, this part of Asia has been considered as a distinct geographical unit since time immemorial. However, due to its vast spatial extent, it was revealed to the observers and explorers of ancient time, only gradually and by stages. It is for this reason we do not get any comprehensive name in early records designating the country as a whole. Exploration of the entire country was completed in or about the fourth century BC. Literatures of this period show acquaintance with the realm of the Pandyas

in the south and even beyond, up to the island of Tamraparni (Sri Lanka). The name "Jambudvipa" was used by that time to denote this region. The term "India" has been derived at a much later date from the name of the River Sindhu or the Indus.

### Geographical Divisions

In ancient literatures we have reference to a fivefold division of India. In the centre of the Indo-Gangetic plain was the Madhya-desa stretching, according to the Brahminical account, from the River Saraswati (which flowed past Thaneswar) on the west up to Allahabad and Varanasi in the east, and according to the early records of the Buddhists, up to the Rajmahal hills on the east.

The western part of this area was known as the Brahmarshi-desa, and the entire region was roughly equivalent to Aryavarta as described between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas.

To the north of the Madhya-desa, beyond Pehoa, lay Uttarapatha or Udicya. Entire Indus valley, which was the cradle of the Rigvedic culture, was included in the Uttarapatha. Mathura was situated in this region.

Aparanta or Pratichya (western India) was Saurashtra and the northern Konkan. Dakshinapatha was the Upper Deccan north of the Krishna. According to some other sources, Dakshinapatha was situated between the Satpura Hills and Rameshwaram.

Further, the far south was termed as Tamalika or the Tamil country. Purvadesa or Pracya (eastern India) was the eastern region. To the five primary divisions, the Puranas sometimes add two others, viz., the Himavata or the Himalayas and the Vindhyan region.

The geographical area occupied by the people of RigVedic time is indicated by the way of mentioning of certain river names that are identifiable. Most important among these are the Kubha (Kabul), the Suvastu (Swat), the Krumu (Kurrum), the Gumal (Gomti), the Sindhu (Indus), the Sushoma (Sohan), the Vitasta (Jhelum), the Asikni (Chenab), Drishadvati (Rakhi or Chitang), the Yamuna, the Ganga and the Sarayu. The reference to these rivers implies the possession of a considerable portion of north Indian plain by the Aryans. Also, there were some other clans occupying at least some parts of this tract being superseded slowly and gradually by the more powerful Aryans.

### Mountains, Hills and Other Geographical Features

In ancient India, major mountains and hills were known by the following names, viz., Himavata (Himalayas), Arbuda Parvata (Aravalli), Sahyadri (Western Ghats), Malayagiri (hills of Kerala), Mahendra Parvata (Eastern Ghats), Vindhya Parvata and else. Names of famous mountain peaks have been mentioned in the map. In addition, some ancient place names have been included.