Name: _____

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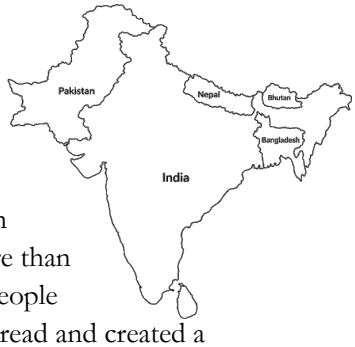
The Indian Subcontinent

The story of the Indian subcontinent apparently begins before we have any evidence of modern humans. Thousands of stone tools were recovered near Chennai dating back as far as 1.5 million years ago, yet the earliest evidence of modern humans comes from about 300,000 years ago. Archaeologist Shanti Pappu, who led the excavation, recalled, "We were very excited, and puzzled too."



A Land of Contrasts

The subcontinent is home to nearly two billion people speaking hundreds of languages and belonging to an endless array of cultures. More than 4,000 years ago, mysterious people developed writing we cannot read and created a civilization that rivaled Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Two world religions began here. Conquerors built enormous empires, while merchants who came seeking riches eventually became rulers. Centuries later, Indians challenged foreign rule with a weapon few conquerors had ever feared: nonviolence.

The Indian Subcontinent

The Indian subcontinent is a peninsula that juts southward from Asia like an enormous arrowhead. Today, it includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and several smaller nations. For most of history, these modern borders did not exist. The Himalayas help make it a distinct landmass within Asia.

While Egypt and Mesopotamia are famous for their ancient civilizations, people on the Indian subcontinent were already living in permanent farming communities more than 9,000 years ago. At Mehrgarh, in present-day Pakistan, farmers grew crops, raised animals, and built permanent mud-brick homes.

Rivers and Monsoons

The subcontinent's geography helps explain how it supports such an enormous population. Rivers flowing from the Himalayas carried rich soil from the mountains onto the plains below. Each summer, monsoon winds bring months of heavy rain that provide water for crops. Together, the rivers and monsoons created some of the most productive farmland on Earth.

The rivers are also a metaphor for two world religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, that began on the subcontinent. Just as water from the mountains brought new life to the land, both religions developed around beliefs in a continuing cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Gateways to the Subcontinent

The Himalayas formed a formidable barrier along the northern edge of the subcontinent, but the Hindu Kush to the northwest was more porous. Mountain passes created gateways into the subcontinent. For thousands of years, migrants, merchants, armies, and new ideas entered India through these passes.

Some brought ideas that reshaped the subcontinent's social and religious order; others came as conquerors to rule. Over time, the empires that followed blended traditions rather than replacing them. Muslim rulers built powerful states combining Indian and Islamic traditions, leaving behind monuments such as the Taj Mahal.

A New Route

For thousands of years, outsiders had entered the subcontinent through mountain passes. Then Europeans found another route: the sea. European traders came seeking India's spices, cotton, silk, and other valuable goods. In time, trade turned into conquest, and Britain came to rule most of the subcontinent. How Indians freed themselves from British rule without an army is an extraordinary story.

The Subcontinent Today

Today, the subcontinent is rapidly becoming richer and more powerful, while nearly two billion people create enormous opportunities and equally enormous challenges. High-tech corporations, modern factories, and ancient traditions exist side by side, while a cow may still wander freely through the streets of a crowded city.

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Name: _____

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Fill in the Blanks

The Indian s__b__o__t__n__nt has a long and ★m__s__e__io__s history. Stone tools found near C__e__n__i date back as far as 1.5 m__l__i__n years, but there is no ★o__v__o__s explanation of how they got there. Today, the subcontinent includes the nations of I__d__a, Pakistan, B__n__l__d__sh, Nepal, and B__u__an. More than __,000 years ago, farmers at M__h__g__rh in present day ★P__k__st__n grew crops, raised animals, and built p__r__a__e__t homes. Rivers flowing from the H__m__l__y__s deposited rich soil, while m__n__o__n rains provided water for crops. The religions of H__n__u__sm and B__d__h__sm also began on the s__b__o__t__n__nt. The moutains of the H__m__l__y__s formed a barrier, but p__s__es through the Hindu Kush allowed m__g__a__ts, merchants, a__m__es, and new i__e__s to enter the subcontinent. Today, nearly two b__l__i__n people live on the subcontinent, where high-tech c__r__o__a__i__ns, modern f__c__o__i__s, and ancient t__a__i__i__ns exist side by side.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. Why did Shanti Pappu say her team was "very excited, and puzzled too."

_____

_____

_____

2. Give two examples of why the text describes the Indian subcontinent as a land of contrasts?

_____

_____

_____

★3. Use only context clues from the reading to define "subcontinent." Do not use any outside resources. Your answer can be wrong and still receive full credit as long as you explain your thinking in a complete sentence.

_____

_____

_____

★4. How did geography both help and challenge the people of the Indian subcontinent? Give at least one example of each.

_____

_____

_____

★ This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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