



GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ACTIVITY 6

The Saraswati: India's Lost River

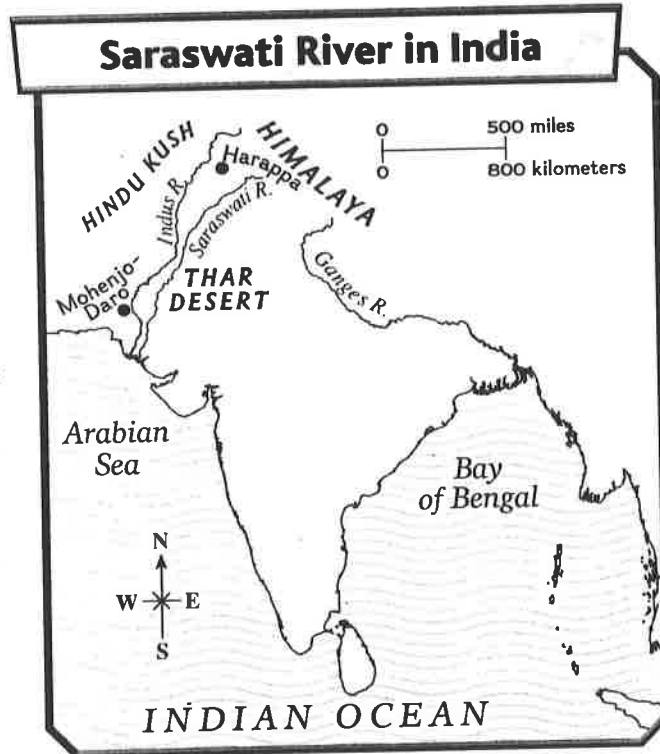
In the western portion of India is the Thar Desert. It is about 100,000 square miles (259,000 sq. km) in area, and it is extremely hot and dry. But it was not always that way. In ancient times, part of the area was farmland along a now-vanished river known as the Saraswati.

Loosely translated, Saraswati means "mother of waters." Along with the Indus River, the Saraswati was once home to the great civilizations that were centered in the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. It was a twin river to the Indus, much like the Tigris was to the Euphrates in ancient Mesopotamia. The Saraswati flowed for more than 1,000 miles (1,609 km) from the Himalaya to the Arabian Sea.

In the fertile land between the two rivers, wheat, barley, rice, vegetables, fruits, and cotton were grown. Animals were raised for dairy products and meat. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of more than 2,500 settlements in this region. It is thought that 75 percent of those settlements were along the Saraswati River.

A River Disappears

The Saraswati began in the Himalaya, the source of many other rivers. These rivers include the Indus; the Ganges, which flows east toward the Indian Ocean; and its major tributary, the Jumna. Glacial runoff and melting snow are the sources for these rivers. Scientists believe that an earthquake or some other type of shift in the region occurred around 2500 B.C. This shift may have diverted water away from the Saraswati. The Saraswati's water may have gone to the Indus, the Ganges, or their tributaries.



GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ACTIVITY 6 (continued)

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Cut off from its water source, the Saraswati began to dry up. By 1900 B.C., archaeologists believe that the river ceased to exist. Civilizations along the river also disappeared. Some of the people migrated to the more fertile areas along the Ganges and the plains of central India. Others migrated westward toward Mesopotamia.

Recent Evidence Uncovered

The existence of the Saraswati was not known to the Western world until 1874. Surveys taken since then have helped locate portions of ancient riverbed. Satellite images from many miles above the earth's surface have helped map out much of what was once the river's course.

Today, groups within the Indian government hope that the river can be restored to its former location. They also hope that portions of the adjacent Thar Desert can be cultivated once again. Diverting waters from nearby rivers may make this project possible. If this happens, a large, sparsely populated region of India could be opened for settlement.

Directions: Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. Where did the Saraswati begin and in which direction did it flow?

2. Why did the Saraswati dry up?

3. What happened to the people who lived along the Saraswati after the river dried up?

4. Why does the Indian government want the flow of the Saraswati to be restored?

5. **Inferring** Why do you think the existence of the Saraswati was unknown for so long?

CHAPTER 6

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