



LESSON 2

Arrival of the Aryans

Assignment
Directions:

- Illustrated notes (draw pictures as you read) from "Who were the Aryans" to the end.

Let's travel back in time about 3,500 years to a large wheat field in the Indus Valley. Imagine you are standing in that field, helping your family cut wheat with short, stone knives. It's a hot day, and the sweet smell of wheat rises from the ground.

Suddenly, you hear a rumble, a kind of quiet thunder in the distance. As the sound grows louder, strange figures come into view, speeding toward you. Everyone in the wheat field stops working. They seem to have frozen where they stand.

The fast-moving figures are now close enough for you to see

clearly. Large, powerful animals, unlike any you've ever seen before, are galloping across the plain, pulling two-wheeled carts behind them. Tall men stand upright in the onrushing carts, their swords flashing bronze in the sunlight. Terrified, you hide in the uncut wheat as the carts clatter by you.

As you soon learn, those large animals are horses, and the two-wheeled carts are called chariots. Both of these were unknown in the Indus Valley before this time.

More important, the men aboard the chariots are called **Aryans**. The arrival of the Aryans in the Indus Valley will change the course of Indian history.

THINKING FOCUS

What did the Aryans contribute to Indian culture?

Key Terms

- Aryan
- migration
- caste

Who Were the Aryans?

To the people of the Indus Valley, the Aryans must have seemed strange, indeed. They looked different. They were generally taller than the people who lived in the valley, and they had lighter skin. They spoke a strange language and worshiped unfamiliar gods. Also, their lifestyle was centered on herding rather than farming.

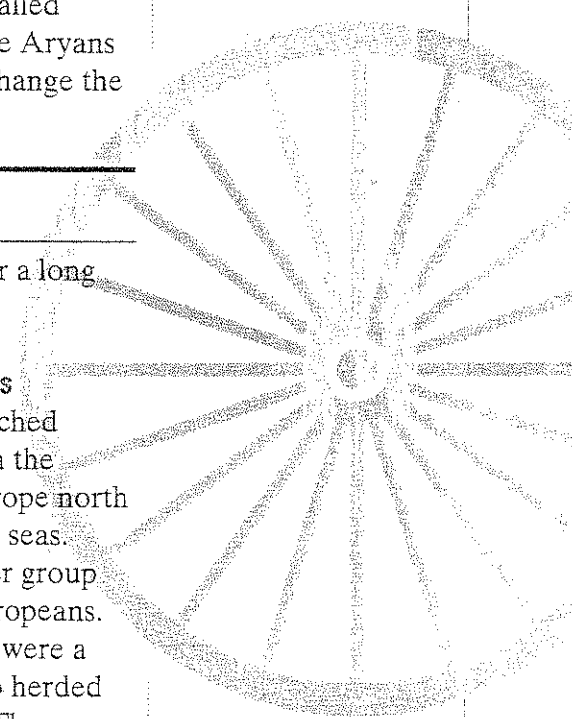
But the Indus Valley people had time to become used to these new arrivals because the Aryans didn't make a mass invasion. Rather, they moved into the Indus

Valley, little by little, over a long period of time.

Indo-European Migrations

Long before they reached India, the Aryans lived in the grasslands of eastern Europe north of the Black and Caspian seas. They were part of a larger group we now call the Indo-Europeans.

The Indo-Europeans were a seminomadic people who herded cattle, goats, and sheep. They generally traveled from place to place in tribes, groups made up of



have suffered an outbreak of disease or an attack by invaders. Whatever the reason, sometime around 2000 B.C., huge groups of Indo-Europeans left their homes and began moving to new regions. This movement of people to new surroundings is called **migration**. As the map on page 231 shows, some groups of Indo-Europeans moved west and south. Others, the Aryans, moved east toward the Indian subcontinent.

Through the Mountain Passes

By around 1500 B.C., the first Aryans found their way through the difficult, high passes in the Hindu Kush, the mountains along the northwestern edge of the Indian subcontinent. One route was through the Khyber Pass. These passes would serve as highways for other migrating and invading peoples for the next 3,000 years.

Aryan Hymns: The Vedas

Although we have little archaeological evidence of the early Aryans, we do have other sources of information. Aryan beliefs and daily life are described in the Vedas (*VAY duhs*), a collection of sacred hymns and poems. They were composed by the Aryans sometime around 1500 B.C.

The early Aryans had no written language, yet they passed down the Vedas for centuries. Aryan priests memorized the Vedas and taught younger priests. Imagine memorizing long school books, word for word, by having them read aloud to you. That gives you some idea of what the Aryan priests did. Passing knowledge from generation to generation by oral tradition wasn't an easy task. ■

related families. Because the Indo-Europeans were on the move much of the time, they didn't build cities. But they did tame the horse and develop a sturdy wheel with spokes for their two-wheeled chariots. These speedy chariots allowed them to move freely over large areas and to wage war more effectively than warriors on foot.

About 2000 B.C., conditions in the Indo-European homeland changed. Historians aren't exactly sure what happened. Perhaps the Indo-Europeans ran out of good grazing pasture for their herds. Perhaps their population had simply grown so much that they needed more space. Or they may

▲ The adz side (left) of this Aryan tool shaped wood; the ax chopped it.

■ What advantages enabled the Aryans to successfully take over the Indus Valley?

▲ Aryans pushed their way through passes in the Hindu Kush mountain range, like this one near Kabul, Afghanistan.

