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Q1

Explain the role of geographical factors towards the development of Ancient India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS I · 10 marks · World's Physical Geography

Salient features of world's physical geography.

Core demand of the question

- Explain the role of geographical factors towards the development of Ancient India
- Cover landforms, rivers, climate, coasts, passes, and minerals
- Keep the explanation within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Harappan cities grew on the Indus system and later states on the **Ganga plains** because alluvium and monsoon rain supported surplus.

The Himalaya, Ghats, and Deccan split cores of settlement and directed routes.

Passes in the north-west and ports on both seas linked India to Central Asia, Rome, and South-East Asia.

Copper, iron, and gold supplied tools and craft.

Geography set the stage; it did not replace human institutions.

Introduction

Ancient India grew where land, water, and climate made farming, craft, and travel possible. Geography did not write history by itself, but it set the places where cities, states, and trade could last.

Body**Rivers and plains**

- The Indus and its tributaries supported the Harappan cities of Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Dholavira, and Lothal on alluvium and floodplains.
- The Ganga-Yamuna doab later carried denser farming, iron-using villages, and mahajanapadas such as Magadha, Kosala, and Kuru.
- The Himalaya fed these rivers with snowmelt and monsoon rain, so irrigation and surplus grain were possible for long seasons.
- The Brahmaputra and the delta of Bengal opened wet-rice belts and river trade toward the Bay of Bengal.

Relief, climate, and resources

- The monsoon gave a reliable crop calendar of kharif and rabi, which is why settled agriculture could support towns and taxes.

- The Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and the **Deccan plateau** created separate cores such as the Godavari-Krishna valleys and the **Kaveri delta**.
- Copper of the Aravalli-Khetri belt, iron of the middle Ganga and Deccan, and gold of the Kolar region supplied tools, weapons, and ornaments.
- **Mountain passes** such as the **Khyber and Bolan** linked the north-west to Central Asia and brought horses, ideas, and invaders on the same roads.

Coasts and frontiers

- The long Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal coasts allowed ports such as Bharuch, Muziris, Arikamedu, and Tamralipti to trade with West Asia, Rome, and South-East Asia.
- Forests of the Vindhya, Western Ghats, and north-east supplied timber, elephants, and tribal labour that states tried to tap.
- Deserts of the Thar and the high Himalaya limited dense settlement, so political centres clustered on the wetter plains.

Way forward for the answer

- Treat geography as a set of opportunities and limits, not as a single cause of culture.
- Name specific rivers, passes, ports, and ores so the explanation stays concrete.

Flow diagram

Himalaya monsoon -> Indus Ganga Brahmaputra
Indus Ganga Brahmaputra -> Farms towns states
Coasts passes -> Trade horses ideas
Copper iron gold -> Farms towns states
Trade horses ideas -> Farms towns states

Conclusion

River plains, monsoon farming, minerals, passes, and coasts together shaped where Ancient India could farm, build states, and trade. Later history still has to add technology and politics, but those choices were made inside this map.

Facts & figures

Harappan river core

Cities such as Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Dholavira, and Lothal stood on the Indus system and related alluvium.

Khyber and Bolan

North-western passes that linked the subcontinent to Central Asian routes for horses, trade, and invasions.

Khetri copper

Aravalli copper belt used from the Chalcolithic onward for tools and ornaments.

Muziris and Arikamedu

Ancient south Indian ports on the monsoon sea route to the Roman world and the Indian Ocean.

Monsoon calendar

Seasonal south-west and north-east winds that structured kharif and rabi farming and sailing seasons.

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