

# Development of Geographical Knowledge in Ancient India

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## 1. Indus Valley Civilization (c. 2500–1500 BCE)

- One of the earliest urban civilizations in the world.
- Cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were well-planned with grid systems, drainage, and standardized architecture.
- Evidence shows knowledge of rivers, fertile plains, and trade routes.
- Maps or drawings on seals suggest awareness of spatial organization.
- Trade with Mesopotamia and other regions reflects geographical understanding of long-distance routes.

## 2. Vedic Period (c. 1500–600 BCE)

- The Rigveda and other Vedic texts provide geographical references.
- Mention of rivers such as Saraswati, Ganga, Yamuna, Sindhu (Indus), and their significance.
- Land divisions and directions (Dik) were identified.
- Concepts of 'Sapta-Sindhu' (land of seven rivers) indicate regional awareness.
- Early cosmological and spatial understanding through hymns.

### 3. Epic Period (Mahabharata and Ramayana)

- The Mahabharata and Ramayana contain rich geographical references.
- Mahabharata describes kingdoms, mountains, rivers, forests, and pilgrim sites across India.
- Ramayana refers to forests, rivers, and distant lands including Lanka (Sri Lanka), indicating knowledge of sea routes.
- The description of routes suggests awareness of vast geographical extents.

### 4. Puranic Age (c. 300 CE onwards)

- Puranas (ancient religious texts) combined mythology with geography.
- They describe the creation of the world, the shape of the earth, and divisions of land.
- The earth (Bhūmi) was often described as circular or lotus-shaped.
- The Puranas also mention mountains, rivers, and sacred sites, blending physical and sacred geography.

### 5. The Seven Dvipas (Islands/Continents) in the Puranas

- According to Puranic cosmology, the earth was divided into seven concentric island-continents (Sapta-Dvipa), each surrounded by a sea of different substances:
- 1. Jambu-dvipa – Considered the central continent where India was located.
- 2. Plaksha-dvipa
- 3. Shalmali-dvipa
- 4. Kusha-dvipa
- 5. Krauncha-dvipa
- 6. Shaka-dvipa
- 7. Pushkara-dvipa
- Each dvipa was separated by oceans of salt water, sugarcane juice, wine, ghee, curd, milk, and sweet water.
- These descriptions were symbolic and cosmological rather than scientific geography.

## Conclusion

- Ancient India had a rich tradition of geographical knowledge.
- From practical urban planning in the Indus Valley Civilization to spiritual and cosmological descriptions in the Puranas, geography was deeply embedded in cultural and intellectual life.
- These stages reflect both empirical understanding and symbolic imagination about the world and its divisions.