

# The Indo-Europeans

## The Big Idea

Indo-Europeans migrated into Europe, India, and Southwest Asia and interacted with peoples living there.

## Why It Matters Now

Half the people living today speak languages that stem from the original Indo-European languages.

## Key Terms and People

Indo-Europeans

steppes

migration

Hittites

Anatolia

Aryans

Vedas

caste

Brahmin

Mahabharata

## Setting the Stage

In India and in Mesopotamia, civilizations first developed along lush river valleys. Even as large cities such as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa declined, agriculture and small urban communities flourished. These wealthy river valleys attracted nomadic tribes. These peoples may have left their own homelands because of warfare or changes in the environment.

## Indo-Europeans Migrate

The **Indo-Europeans** were a group of nomadic peoples who may have come from the **steppes**—dry grasslands that stretched north of the Caucasus (KAW•kuh•suhs). The Caucasus are the mountains between the Black and Caspian Seas. These primarily pastoral people herded cattle, sheep, and goats. The Indo-Europeans also tamed horses and rode into battle in light, two-wheeled chariots. They lived in tribes that spoke forms of a language that we call Indo-European.

**The Indo-European Language Family** The languages of the Indo-Europeans were the ancestors of many of the modern languages of Europe, Southwest Asia, and

## Language Family Resemblances

Notice the similarities of words within the Indo-European family of languages.

English	Sanskrit	Persian	Spanish	German
mother	mātár	muhdáhr	madre	mutter
father	pitár	puhdáhr	padre	vater
daughter	duhitár	dukhtáhr	hija	tochter
new	návas	now	nuevo	neu
six	sát	shahsh	seis	sechs

South Asia. English, Spanish, Persian, and Hindi all trace their origins back to different forms of the original Indo-European language.

Historians can tell where Indo-European tribes settled by their languages. Some Slavic speakers moved north and west. Others, who spoke early Celtic, Germanic, and Italic languages, moved west through Europe. Speakers of Greek and Persian went south. The Aryans (AIR•ee•uhnz), who spoke an early form of Sanskrit, may have relocated to India.

**An Unexplained Migration** The origins and migrations of the Indo-European peoples are controversial topics among scholars with many differing views. There is no certainty as to why these people left their homelands in the steppes. Whatever the reason, Indo-European nomads began to migrate outward in all directions between 1700 and 1200 BC. These **migrations**, movements of a people from one region to another, happened in waves over a long period of time.

### Reading Check

#### Find Main Ideas

Where do some historians think the Indo-Europeans lived before they arrived in India?

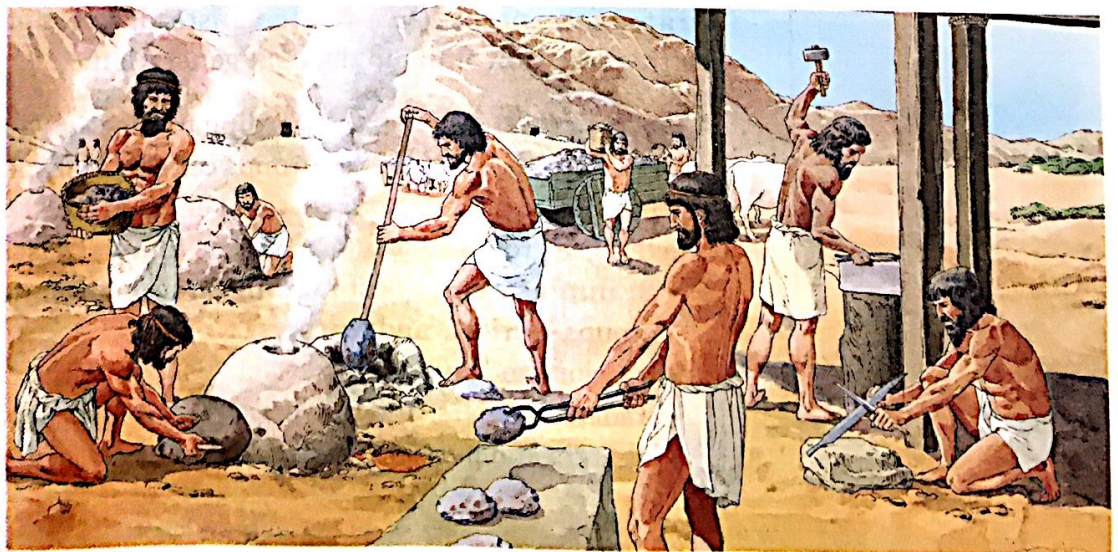
## The Hittite Empire

By about 2000 BC, one group of Indo-European speakers, the **Hittites**, occupied **Anatolia** (an•uh•TOH•lee•uh), also called Asia Minor. Anatolia is a huge peninsula in modern-day Turkey that juts out into the Black and Mediterranean Seas. Anatolia is a high, rocky plateau, rich in timber and agriculture. Nearby mountains hold important mineral deposits. Separate Hittite city-states came together to form an empire there in about 1650 BC. The city of Hattusas (hah•TOO•sahs) was its capital.

The Hittite Empire went on to dominate Southwest Asia for 450 years. Hittites occupied Babylon, the chief city in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, and struggled with Egypt for control of northern Syria. Neither the Hittites nor the Egyptians were able to get the upper hand. So, the two peoples ended their conflicts by signing a peace treaty. They each pledged to help the other fight off future invaders.

**Hittites Adopt and Adapt** The Hittites used their own Indo-European language with one another. However, for international use, they adopted Akkadian, the language of the Babylonians they had conquered. The Hittites borrowed ideas about literature, art, politics, and law from the

This illustration shows the process the Hittites used to make tools and weapons from iron.



Mesopotamians. The Hittites thus blended their own traditions with those of other, more advanced peoples.

**Chariots and Iron Technology** The Hittites excelled in the technology of war. They conquered an empire against Egyptian opposition—largely through their superior chariots and their iron weapons. The Hittite war chariot was light and easy to maneuver. The chariot had two wheels and a wooden frame covered with leather and was pulled by two or sometimes four horses. The Hittite chariot proved itself a superb fighting machine.

The Hittites used iron in their chariots, and they owed many of their military victories to the skill of their ironworkers. Ancient peoples had long known that iron was stronger than bronze. They also knew that it could hold a sharper edge. However, the process of purifying iron ore and working it into weapons and tools is complex. Around 1500 BC, the Hittites were the first in Southwest Asia to work with iron and harden it into weapons of war. The raw materials they needed—iron ore and wood to make charcoal—were easily available to them in the mountains of Anatolia. Knowledge of iron technology traveled widely with the Hittites—in both their trade and conquests.

Despite its military might, the powerful Hittite Empire fell quite suddenly around the year 1190 BC. As part of a great wave of invasions, tribes attacked from the north and burned the Hittite capital city.

## Aryans Transform India

Before 2000 BC, the Hittites began establishing themselves in Anatolia. At the same time, some scholars believe, another Indo-European people, the **Aryans**, whose homeland was probably somewhere between the Caspian and Aral Seas, crossed over the northwest mountain passes into the Indus River valley of India. Other scholars believe the Aryans originated in India. There is no archaeological evidence to prove either hypothesis.

Though they left almost no archaeological record, their sacred literature, the **Vedas** (VAY-duhz), left a picture of Aryan life. The Vedas are four collections of prayers, hymns, instructions for performing rituals, and spells and incantations. The most important of the collections is the Rig Veda. The Rig Veda contains 1,028 hymns to Aryan gods. For many years, no written form of the Vedas existed. Instead, elders of one generation passed on this tradition orally to the next generation.

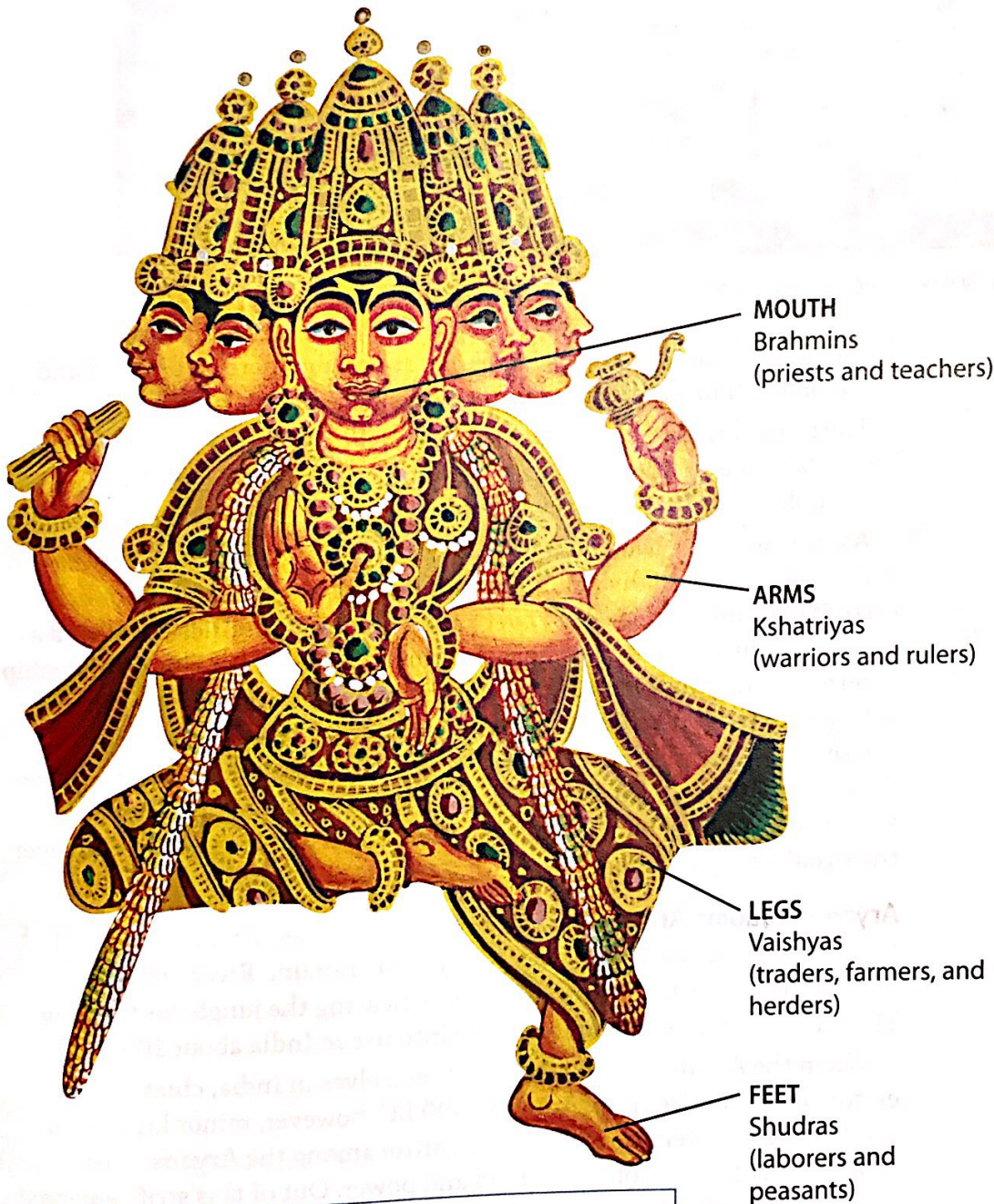
**A Caste System Develops** According to the Rig Veda, ancient Indian society was divided into four groups called varnas. Later, in the 15th century AD, explorers from Portugal encountered this social system and called these groups **castes** (kasts). The four varnas are:

- **Brahmins**, the highest ranking, and smallest numerically, of the groups—priests and teachers
- warriors and rulers
- traders, farmers, and herders
- laborers and peasants

Reading Check  
**Analyze Effects**  
How did environmental features in Anatolia help the Hittites advance technologically?

## The Aryan Caste System

The four major castes emerged from Purusha (the first human being) shown below. Purusha is identified with the creator god Brahma. The Brahmins (priests and teachers) were his mouth; the warriors and rulers were his arms; the traders, farmers, and herders were his legs; and the laborers and peasants were his feet.



### Interpret Visuals

**Make Inferences** Why might the caste of Brahmins (priests and teachers) have been associated with the mouth?



This painting of Krishna battling with a demon in the form of a snake was created in 1785.

These groups, once fluid and flexible, later became more structured and based on birth in ways similar to the guild system in Europe.

The roles played by the four varnas were alluded to in a passage in the Rig Veda that describes the creation of humans. According to this passage, the people of the four varnas were created from the body of a single being.

As time went on, the four basic castes gradually grew more complex—with hundreds of subdivisions. Classical texts make no mention of how caste is determined. However, over time, some communities developed a system in which people were born into their caste. Their caste membership determined the work they did, whom they could marry, and the people with whom they could eat. Cleanliness and purity became all-important. Those considered the most impure because of their work (butchers, grave-diggers, collectors of trash) lived outside the caste structure. They were known as “untouchables,” since even their touch was believed to endanger the ritual purity of others.

**Aryan Kingdoms Arise** Over the next few centuries, Aryans extended their settlements east, along the Ganges and Yamuna River valleys. Progress was slow because of difficulties clearing the jungle for farming. This task grew easier when iron came into use in India about 1000 BC.

When the Aryans first established themselves in India, chiefs were elected by the entire tribe. Around 1000 BC, however, minor kings who wanted to set up territorial kingdoms arose among the Aryans. They struggled with one another for land and power. Out of this strife emerged a major kingdom: Magadha. Under a series of ambitious kings, Magadha began expanding in the sixth century BC by taking over surrounding kingdoms. By the second century BC, Magadha had expanded south to occupy almost all of the Indian subcontinent.

The **Mahabharata** (mah•huh•BAH•ruh•tuh), one of the great epics of India, reflects the struggles that took place in India as the Aryan kings fought for control of Indian lands. One part of the *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad Gita*. It tells the story of a warrior prince named Arjuna, who is counseled by his chariot driver, Krishna, an incarnation of the Hindu deity Vishnu.

One of the most famous incidents in Indian literature occurs when Krishna instructs the young warrior on the proper way to live, fight, and die:

*“He who thinks this Self [eternal spirit] to be a slayer, and he who thinks this Self to be slain, are both without discernment; the Soul slays not, neither is it slain. . . . But if you will not wage this lawful battle, then will you fail your own [caste] law and your honor, and incur sin. . . . The people will name you with dishonor; and to a man of fame dishonor is worse than death.”*

—Krishna, speaking in the *Bhagavad Gita*

The violence and confusion of the time led many to speculate about the place of the gods and human beings in the world. As a result, religion in India gradually changed. New religions were born, which you will read about in the next few lessons.

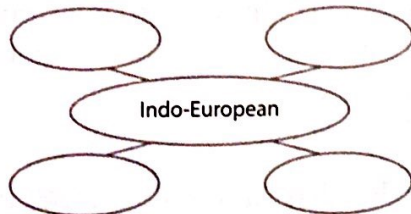
### Reading Check

#### Make Inferences

How were the more physical forms of work viewed by Aryans?

## Lesson 1 Assessment

1. **Organize Information** What are some languages that originated from Indo-European roots?



2. **Key Terms and People** For each key term in the lesson, write a sentence explaining its significance.

3. **Form Opinions** What important contributions did the Aryans make to the culture and way of life in India in terms of religion, literature, and roles in society?
4. **Draw Conclusions** What made the Hittite chariot an excellent fighting machine?
5. **Analyze Effect** What are the advantages and disadvantages of the varna system?