Between the Mountains and the Sea
What geographic features separate India from the rest of the continent of Asia?

Ancient India, located in South Asia, was home to many early civilizations. The geography of South Asia enabled these civilizations to grow and prosper. Ancient India included territory that makes up the modern-day countries of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

The northern boundary of India is lined with vast mountain ranges. The tall Himalayas, which contain Mount Everest, are located to the northeast, while the Hindu Kush mountains rise to the northwest. The Himalayas and the Hindu Kush were formed millions of years ago, but they are still relatively young (the Himalayas began rising 25 million to 30 million years ago, whereas the Rocky Mountains began to form 190 million to 1 billion years ago). These mountains continue to grow several inches each year. The movement of the tectonic plates that continues to make these mountains grow is also responsible for causing many earthquakes in the Hindu Kush and Himalayas region. In 2011, a 6.9-magnitude earthquake in this region killed many people and caused a lot of damage.

The southern portion of India is surrounded by two large bodies of water—the Bay of Bengal and the
**Arabian Sea.** The Arabian Sea would eventually become an important trade route between South Asia and the rest of the world. Both of these bodies of water are a part of the Indian Ocean.

**A Subcontinent**
Although India is part of Asia, it is geographically separated from the rest of the continent by the mountains to the north and the ocean to the south. Because of this unusual geographic separation, geographers often refer to this region as the **Indian subcontinent** or South Asia. This region is located between 8° and 37° latitude north and 68° and 97° longitude east.

Water and mountains surrounded ancient India. This geographic isolation protected the people who settled in this region. It was extremely difficult for outside invaders to reach the **subcontinent** without making dangerous journeys over the mountains or across the ocean. The region also offered other benefits for its early inhabitants. It had natural water sources and a **climate** that allowed agriculture. Despite its geographic separation from civilizations in other parts of Asia and East Africa, ancient India traded with civilizations both near and far.