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1. Describe the distinguishing features of the Indus Valley Civilization and compare them with those of the Early Vedic period.

Indus Valley Civilization (IVC):

The Indus Valley Civilization (c. 2600–1900 BCE), also called the Harappan Civilization, was one of the world's earliest urban cultures. Spanning northwest India and modern-day Pakistan, major sites include Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Dholavira, and Lothal. It was marked by planned cities, advanced drainage systems, standardized weights, and undeciphered script. The economy was based on agriculture, trade, and crafts.

Early Vedic Period:

The Early Vedic period (c. 1500–1000 BCE) followed the decline of IVC, marked by the arrival of Indo-Aryans. The Rigveda, the oldest Vedic text, was composed during this time. Society was semi-nomadic, pastoral, and organized into tribes. Settlements grew along the Saraswati and western Ganga plains. Polity was tribal, with kinship-based rulers.

Distinguishing Features and Comparison:

| Aspect | Indus Valley Civilization | Early Vedic Period |
|------------------|--|--|
| Urbanization | Highly urbanized with grid planning, drainage | Rural, tribal settlements without urban planning |
| Polity | Centralized or possibly theocratic; no clear evidence of kings | Tribal chieftains (Rajan); no strong state formation |
| Economy | Agriculture, trade (domestic & overseas), crafts | Pastoralism dominant; early agriculture and cattle economy |
| Script | Undeciphered pictographic script | Oral tradition; no script used |
| Religion | Mother goddess, proto-Shiva, nature worship | Nature gods (Indra, Agni), fire rituals, hymns |
| Social Structure | Possibly egalitarian, no evidence of rigid hierarchy | Emergence of Varna system; patriarchal society |

Conclusion:

While the Indus Valley Civilization showcased advanced urban life, the Early Vedic period reflected a simpler, tribal and pastoral society. The transition indicates a shift from urban sophistication to rural social organization before the later Vedic period laid foundations for classical Indian society.

2. Examine the socio-economic factors that led to the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism in the 6th century BCE.

Jainism and Buddhism

Jainism, founded by **Vardhamana Mahavira**, and Buddhism, founded by **Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)**, arose in the 6th century BCE as major religious reform movements. Both emphasized ethical conduct, renunciation, and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (moksha/nirvana), offering alternatives to Vedic rituals.

Socio-Economic Factors Behind Their Emergence:

1. **Opposition to Ritualism and Brahmanical Dominance:**

The Vedic religion had become ritualistic, dominated by priests (Brahmins), and inaccessible to common people. The complexity and cost of yajnas alienated many. Jainism and Buddhism rejected sacrificial rituals and offered a more egalitarian spiritual path.
Example: The rejection of Vedic yajnas by Buddha and Mahavira appealed to merchants and commoners.

2. **Growth of Urban Centers and Trade:**

The 6th century BCE saw the rise of **urbanization** and **mercantile classes** in cities like Rajagriha and Vaishali. These new classes sought a religion that valued **ethical living over birth-based hierarchy**.
Example: Wealthy traders like Anathapindika became patrons of Buddhism.

3. **Agricultural Expansion and Social Stratification:**

The use of iron tools led to agricultural growth in the eastern Gangetic plains, leading to **land disputes** and **increased social tensions**. The **varna system** grew more rigid, creating dissatisfaction among lower varnas.

4. **Political Support and Patronage:**

Emerging Mahajanapadas, such as Magadha and Kosala, supported new religions for **political legitimacy** and to counter Brahmanical power.

Example: Bimbisara and later Ashoka supported Buddhism.

Conclusion:

The rise of Jainism and Buddhism was rooted in growing socio-economic discontent, changing class structures, and the search for simpler, ethical spiritual alternatives. Their teachings resonated with diverse groups and helped reshape Indian religious thought.