

Early Vedic Civilization

EXERCISES

Question 1.

Name any two early Aryan settlements.

Answer:

The early Aryans settled in the Sapta-Sindhu region which comprised the five rivers of Punjab namely—Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej and the river Indus (Sindhuj) and the river Sarasvati.

Question 2.

Name the first of the Vedas. Or Which is the oldest Vedic literature.

Answer:

The Rig Veda is the oldest Vedic literature.

Question 3.

What does the Riji Veda contain ?

Answer:

It contains hymns in praise of different Gods and Goddesses like – Indra, varuna and Agni.

Question 4.

Mention any of the Vedic hymns that enables us reconstruct the Early Vedic Civilization.

Answer:

Agni. Agni was the personification of the ‘sacrificial fire.’ Sacrifices or yajnas occupied a prominent place in the early Vedic religion. Agni was thought of a messenger or a bearer of offerings (of milk, grain, ghee, etc.) from men to Gods.

Question 5.

How can you say that the Rig Vedic Age was the Non Iron using phase of Vedic history ?

Answer:

The copper and the bronze were available in abundance, while the use of iron was not known to the Rig Vedic Age.

Question 6.

Name any two of the four Varnas.

Answer:

The Brahmins and the Kshtriyas.

Question 7.

What was the position of women in the Rig Vedic age ?

Answer:

Women were treated as being equal with men. They took part in all religious rites. Women were given education. Girls had freedom in the choice of husbands. Monogamy and polygamy both were popular. Child-marriage, the sati system and purdah did not exist among the Aryans. The women attended all the social functions and gatherings. People prayed for the birth of sons in particular, but there are no clues of prayers for the birth of a daughter.

Question 8.

What were the two main occupations of the Rig Vedic Aryans?

Answer:

Domestication of the animals and agriculture.

Question 9.

What form of worship did the Aryans follow during the early Vedic period?

Answer:

The early Vedic period comprised worshiping of several gods. The Aryans used to worship Gods of the Sky or Heaven, Gods of the Atmosphere, Gods of the Earth, Sacrifices or the Yajnas.

Question 10.

Name the two political institutions which exercised check on the powers of the King in the Rig Vedic period.

Answer:

The Samiti and the Sabha.

Question 11.

Mention the important features of the religion of the early Vedic period.

Answer:

The religion of the early Vedic period was very simple. The people worshiped various forces of nature as manifestations of the Supreme God. Thus, they worshiped a number of Nature Gods. The Aryans did not build any temples or worshiped idols. They used to chant hymns in the open air. Sacrifices or the Yajnas occupied a prominent place in the early Vedic period.

Question 12.

State the importance of Sacrifices in the early Vedic ritual.

Answer:

The Aryans propitiated their Gods by performing sacrifices. The common items of offerings for the sacrifice included ghee, milk, grain, flesh and soma juice. Every householder performed the sacrifice by kindling the sacred fire and reciting hymns. All the members of the family participated in these ceremonies.

Question 13.

Mention the important changes that took place in their religion of the later Vedic period.

Answer:

In the later Vedic period, Vajpeya sacrifice was performed by a new king at the time of his coronation. The Rajasuya sacrifice was performed to appease Gods in order to ensure the material well-being of the kingdom. The Ashvamedha sacrifice was performed for a powerful king to proclaim that he was the 'King of Kings'.

Structure Questions.

Question 1.

Discuss the sources to reconstruct the Early Vedic (Rig Vedic) Past with reference to the following:

- (a) Indra, the most favorite God of the Aryans
- (b) Agni, the personification of Sacrificial fire.
- (c) References to the Cow in the Rig Vedic hymns

Answer:

(a)

In the Rig Veda, Indra is the king of the gods and ruler of the heavens. Indra is the God of thunder and rain and a great warrior, a symbol of courage and strength. He leads the Deva (the gods who form and maintain Heaven) and the elements, such as Agni (Fire), Varuna (Water) and Surya (Sun). He thus fights in a timeless battle between good and evil. As the God of war, he is also regarded as one of the guardians of the directions, representing the East. As the favorite national god of the Vedic Indians, Indra has about 250 hymns dedicated to him in the Rigveda, more than those devoted to any other god and almost one fourth of the total number of hymns of the Rigveda.

(b)

Agni, the Vedic god of fire who presides over the earth, has made transition into the Hindu pantheon of gods, without losing his importance. With Vayu and Indra, who presided over the air and sky, he is one of the supreme gods in Rig Veda. The link between heaven and earth, he is associated with Vedic sacrifice, taking offerings to the other world in the fire. Agni is a deva, second only to Indra in the power and importance attributed to him in Vedic mythology. Agni stands for knowledge for it is seen by the learned people, covering all things that move and do not move and because it is summers the Devatas endowed with knowledge. The light Agni units is the light of knowledge, therefore it is known as illuminator of knowledge who lights up the path leading to truth.

(c)

Cow has been a symbol of wealth since ancient Vedic times. In the Rig Veda, the cows figure frequently as symbols to wealth, and also in comparison with river goddesses. The Vedic god Indra is often compared to a bull. River are often linked to cows in the Rigveda.

Question 2.

Describe the social life of the Rig Vedic Aryans with reference to the following:

- (a) The Family Structure
- (b) Position of Women
- (c) Varna System

Answer:

With reference to the given heads the social life of the Rig Vedic Aryans is described below:

(a)

The Family Structure: The basic unit of the social structure was the 'family'. The joint family system was prevalent. Houses in this age, were built of wood or reed. The Rig Vedic society was patriarchal in which Grihyapati(master of the house) dominated in family and social life.

(b)

Position of Women: Women were given equal status to that of men in society. They were permitted to participate in all the religious rites. Gaining of education had not been restricted to them. There were women scholars who composed hymns and were well-versed in the sacred scriptures. Girls could seek husbands of their own choice.

Monogamy was in custom, but polygamy was also practiced by many. Child-marriage, the Sati system and Purdah did not exist among the Aryans, The women attended all social functions and gatherings. The general tendency of people was to have male births rather than the females. They used to perform prayers seeking the birth of the male-child. But, in case of females, people had a repulsive attitude they did not like to have female-baby.

(c)

Varna System: One hymn in the last book of the Rig Veda refers to four orders of society — the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the The people who explained the Vedic texts and performed the religious ceremonies were called the Brahmins. Those who belonged to the ruling class, were the Kshatriyas. The common people, who were engaged in agriculture, trade and industry were the Vaisyas. The Shudras were the menial workers who did not have much to own. Scholars are of the opinion that the term 'Varna' in the Rig Veda, refers to the racial difference between the Aryans and non-Aryans. It is in this context that the terms Arya Varna and Dasa Varna came into use. There was no ban on the taking of food cooked by Shudras and no restrictions on intermarriages or change of occupation.

Question 3.

With reference to the following explain the main features of the Rig Vedic Economy:

- (a) Agriculture
- (b) Domestication of Animals
- (c) Trade Transactions, Crafts and Transportation

Answer:

With reference to the given headings, the economic life of the Rig Vedic Aryans is explained as follows:

(a) Agriculture: The Rig Vedic Aryans were mainly scattered in villages. They frequently prayed for plentiful rain and bountiful harvest, large herds of cattle and good

health. It shows that agriculture was an important occupation of the village folk. However, the only grain referred to in the Rig Veda is Yava which could mean grain in general or barley in particular.

(b) Domestication of Animals: The Rig Vedic Aryans had mainly a pastoral economy. Cattle formed an important item of dona (gifts) made to the priests. The word Gomat was used to signify a wealthy person. It meant the one who possessed many cattle, especially the cows and bulls. Other domesticated animals were the ox, the horse, the dog, the goat and the sheep.

(c) Trade Transactions, Crafts and Transportation:

The people were engaged in trade, cloth and leather goods being the main items. The barter system practiced for trade transactions. The cow was the standard unit of value. Men and women were engaged in weaving cloth. The metal-workers or the smiths were skilled in making weapons, implements and ornaments. The metal ayas mentioned in the Rig Veda is generally taken to mean copper or bronze, although it has been understood as iron also.

They used horses and bullocks for carrying goods from place to place. They also transported goods through the inland rivers