India is one of the oldest civilizations with a variety of people and a rich cultural heritage. It is interesting to note that many races and tribes were intermingled in early India. The Greeks, the Scythians, the Hunas, the Turks, and others made India their home. Each ethnic group contributed its mite to the evolution of the Indian social system, art, architecture, language and literature. All these people and their cultural traits mingled so inextricably that currently they can be clearly identified in their original form.

When Europeans first began to take an interest in the religion of India, some of them were told of the very ancient sacred texts called the Vedas. But they were handed down orally from one generation of BrÂ±hmaÂ¡s to another. The Â¿gvedas had been passed on orally for nearly three thousand years, with hardly an error. Yet, most of the BrÂ±hmaÂ¡s who had memorized it, had only the very vaguest notions of its meaning, because its language was so archaic
that it was almost unintelligible to even one trained in classical Sanskrit.¹

The Ṛgveda is the oldest and the most important text, having been composed between 1500 and 900 B.C.² It is a collection consisting of 1028 hymns, addressed to various gods and intended to be chanted at sacrifices, where a hallucinogenic beverage, Soma, was made and drunk. One of the world’s foremost scholars of ancient Indian culture and Religion, A.L. Basham, argues in his book The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism³ that, the authors of the Vedic hymns were certainly not the inhabitants of the ancient Indus cities. He explains various examples and facts to prove his arguments. According to him, the people who composed and sang the hymns were priests and sages or group of people who called themselves Ērya.

11. Antiquity of Vedic Civilization

There are several theories regarding the original home of Ēryans. Among Historians and Indologists, the theories like the

¹ A.L. Basham, The Origins and Development of classical Hinduism, p. 6, 7.
² Ibid., p. 8.
³ Ibid., p. 8.
Eryan invasion and the indigenous origin are the prevalent ones. This thesis is not entering in this debate. This attempt is to evaluate the position of women in the Vedic literature and if possible in its continuity up to this day. According to a leading theory, the Vedic civilization was the creation of the Eryans, an invading people, whose first arrival in the subcontinent is probably to be dated about 1500 B.C. After 200 years of this estimated date, a collection of religious hymns emerged which were eventually organized as the Ṛgveda, the final reduction of which probably antedates 1000 B.C.4

The name Erya was represented as being in a state of permanent conflict with a hostile group of people known variously as Dīsa or Dasyu. From the frequent reference to these conflicts, it emerges that their result was the complete victory of the Eryans. During the period represented by the later Samhitas and the Brāhmaṇa texts, the Eryans are seen to have extended their territory, principally in the direction of the east, down the Gaṅgā Valley, and references to conflicts with the Dīsa are rare. Other terms, for

example Mleccha and Niñjda are used as designation of non-Aryan tribes, while the word D¡sa becomes the usual word for ‘slave’, while the feminine form D¡sa is used in the sense of slave girl. In the latter context, the word Aryan naturally acquires the meaning noble, honourable, and the word continues in use in both senses down to the classical period. North India is referred to as Aryan✈arta, ‘the country where the Aryans live,’ or, in P¿li, as ariyam ayatanam.

The Jaina texts have frequent references to the distinction between Aryan and Mleccha. In Tamil literature, the kings of north India are referred to Aryan kings. On the other hand, the ethical use of the word is illustrated by the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path, where the word has no ethnic significance.⁵

12. Vedic Literature

Vedic literature is the most important and valuable contribution of the Aryan to Indian culture. The word Veda literally means knowledge and supreme knowledge too. There are four texts of the Vedas which are known as the Ígveda, the Yajurveda, the S¿maveda and the Atharvaveda. The first three constitute the triad

⁵ The Illustrated Cultural History of India, p. 24
(Trayas). They are the original Vedas and enjoy higher authority. The Atharvaveda is said to be a later addition. But it is applied secondarily to the Vedic literature comprising the Samhitas, the Brähma, as, the Ṛaṇyakas, and the Upaniṣads. These books, are considered to be the direct revelations from god, embodying the supreme truth, that could not be gained by any effort of the human mind. So they are regarded as apauruṣeya, i.e., not of human origin. The Vedas are called āruti, either because they were directly heard from god, or because the traditional method of studying and getting them by heart is by hearing them recited by the preceptor. Pñini uses the term chandas to distinguish Vedic literature from classical Sanskrit. Yāska also describes Vedic literature as chandas. The great Śiṅga, Ācyāya, has defined the Veda in the very beginning of his commentary on the Kaññya Yajurveda, a book which reveals the knowledge of supernatural methods for the achievement of the desired object and the avoidance of the undesirable. According to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the Original Veda, first revealed by god to the Ṛṣis, consisted of one hundred thousand verses, and had four divisions.

7 VIṢṇu Purāṇa, p.36.
The Īgveda is only the first constituent of a great body of literature known as Vedic by western scholars and classed by Hindu tradition as āruti, that which has been heard. The Īgveda is divided into ten sections, or books, called in Sanskrit as, ma¸·alas cycles of varying length. Internal evidence indicates that the books from the second to the seventh were composed by sages of separate families from the oldest stratum. Later, there is the emergence of the hymns of books eight, nine, one, and ten, in that order, though there is probably much overlapping. It is certain, however, from the language, style, and content, that many of the hymns of book ten were composed many centuries later than some of those of the earliest books.

The hymns vary widely in style and content. Most of them are in praise of the gods, the most popular of whom is Indra, the god of war and weather, who has about two hundred and fifty hymns in his honour, followed by Agni, the fire god, with approximately two hundred hymns. Several hymns, however, are not addressed to gods at all. There is one hymn, mostly lost, celebrating the marriage of Śrīya, the daughter of the Sun god, verses of which are still recited at orthodox Hindu weddings. ⁸

⁸ RV. X.85.6.
One or two hymns are for use at funeral rites. There are strange riddle hymns. Other hymns are apparently more or less secular, such as a hymn addressed to the frogs that croak in the rainy season, apparently a rainmaking charm, and the touching lament of a ruined gambler. Some hymns are in the dialogue form, referring to legends, the details of which have long been lost. There are also victory hymns, celebrating the victory of a certain king named Suds over a coalition of his enemies. Though there is a certain similarity about the \( \text{Igveda} \), there is also much variety, and the reader who tackles the whole volume is rewarded by many unexpected beauties and stirring passages among the rather repetitive verses of the hymns.

The hymns of the \( \text{Igveda} \) have existed from eternity. The seers did not compose them; they "saw" them; they were inspired to transmit everlasting utterances of enormous spiritual power. Their meaning is not significant; it is the holy sound that counts. For this reason, according to tradition, these hymns are never to be taught.

9. \( \text{Igveda} \), VII.103.1.
10. \( \text{Igveda} \), VII.124.
to or learned by a woman or a member of the lower orders of society, a á£dra. 11

Though they form the oldest religious literature of India, the hymns of the Êgveda are in no way archaic or primitive. They were composed according to strict metrical schemes by sophisticated priests with already developed conventions of poetics and a theology that, if varied and sometimes apparently self-contradictory, was far removed from the simple nature worship, attributed by some earlier scholars to primitive humans.

In India, the ancient traditions of cosmic conflict, the gods and the demons have played an important part in Hindu mythology and in the beliefs of the masses. Most of the gods were connected with heaven, light and fire. Opposed to them were the demons. Each of the gods had a specific function, which was carried out unfailingly. The gods followed àta, the cosmic order, the straight forward and regular course of nature. The demons, on the other hand, practised anàta, non-àta; they tried to overturn the system of nature. The term àta giving way to the concept of dharma, but anàta

11. According to the law book, if a á£dra hears the Veda being recited, his ears are to be filled with molten lead. Mns. IV.99, S.B. XIV.1.1.31. (See p. 113)
remained in use, in the sense of falsehood or unrighteousness. Among the gods of the Ṛgveda, some were already losing their importance when the hymns were composed.

Only four hymns are addressed to Dyuṣ, the god of the overarching heaven. The word Dyuṣ, like deva, is derived from the root *dīv-* (to shine) and means the shining one. Dyuṣ is generally coupled with Pātim and no single hymn of the Ṛgveda is addressed to him alone. In many of the earlier hymns of the Ṛgveda, Varuṇa appears as the chief god. He sits in a fine hall or place in heaven, from where he watches the world below with the help of his spies, who travel throughout the cosmos and bring back news to him. He punishes sinners, first with disease and then with incarceration in the House of clay. Another of Varuṇa’s function is to act as guardian of the āta, which seems to have been thought of as a principle behind and prior to even the gods.
Of all the great gods of the Ígveda the most popular was Indra, the god of war and rain.\textsuperscript{14} In one myth, the details of which are clearly alluded to in the Ígveda, where Indra appears as the creator of the cosmos. When the demons, led by the monstrous serpent Vòtra, were attacking the gods and threatening their very existence, the young Indra, fortified by drinking three beakers of the sacred Soma, went out alone to wage the battle with the demons. It was a tough fight and at times Indra was forced to turn and flee before his assailant, but in the end the monster was slain. From his dead body Indra fashioned the world. As a result of Indra's victory, the waters, which had been pent up in the mountain caves by Vòtra and his henchmen, were set free and flew downward for the welfare of man, overwhelming the dead body of the demon. This is generally taken as a rainmaking myth.\textsuperscript{15} Indra has always had the status of a rain god, bringing on the monsoon in June after destroying the evil forces that held it back.

In the Ígveda, however, his chief function is that of a war leader. He is recorded as having destroyed, in bygone years, the
stone fortresses of the Djas.\textsuperscript{16} He is a heavy drinker of the
inebriating Soma and appears to be likened to a young warlord of
an Êryan tribe, fierce and dissolute but true to his word and loyal to
his underlings. There is evidence that his star began to set before
the compilation of the Ígveda was completed, for a few hymns
suggest that many men had lost faith in him.

Agni is the fire god. The word agni is cognate with Latin
ignis and means simply ‘fire.’ Very important in the religion of the
Êryans, though less strongly personified than Indra, was Agni. It is
through Agni that the sacrificial offerings are brought to the gods
and he has a very important function as an intermediary between
gods and men.\textsuperscript{17} Every Êryan family has its domestic Agni in the
family hearth, and thus Agni was very closely in touch with humans.
Agni is hidden in the dark rain cloud and flashes forth as lightning.
Agni blazes in the fire of the sacrifice. Agni is manifested in myriad
ways throughout the world.
Soma to whom all the hymns of the ninth book of the *Igveda* are addressed, is the vague personification of a plant from which a potent beverage was made. Soma was made as part of the sacrificial ritual, by pressing the plant between stones, mixing the juice with milk, and filtering it through a sheepkin. Soma was associated with the moon, but in the *Igveda* he is simply the king of plants, the bestower of immortality through the miraculous beverage he provides. The consumption of Soma was permitted only during sacrifices, and it evidently produced vivid hallucinations, such as having a sense of growing to gigantic size and possessing superhuman strength or experiencing visions of the gods come down to join the worshippers on the sacrificial site. One hymn that describes a drunken Indra represents the feelings of a worshipper after having imbibed the sacred Soma.  

Several gods were connected with the sun. Sêrya, the Sun god, means simply the ‘Sun’, Agni means simply fire. Other solar gods were Savitê, the inspirer or the emanator; PêÀan, the invigorator or stimulator, and ViÀ¸u, the permeator. ViÀ¸u was remembered in RV. X.119.1.
later times, and out of them a new legend developed concerning one of his avatars, or incarnations.\textsuperscript{19} Another god who was to gain in importance in later times was Rudra.

13. Goddesses

The Pantheon in the Vedas included goddesses and semi divine Apsaras. They were numerous but of relatively minor importance. The Ígvedic hymn, reveals that its ritualism mainly centres round the male deities. Here only a few humans invoke the goddesses. It is ascertained that twenty one hymns are addressed to the goddesses Ú̄as; one to the goddess R̄tr̄, one to P̄at̄iv̄, four to the goddess P̄arp̄; one to the goddess V̄̄k̄; and three hymns to the goddess Sarasvat̄. Some of the major goddesses of the Ígveda, who may be listed as used, are Aditi and Sarasvat̄.

Ú̄as is the most graceful goddess adorning the Vedic heavens.\textsuperscript{20} Ú̄as does not stand alone, she is associated with and made the sister of other gods like the night, the Sun god and the


moon, and this association produces an abundance of poetic and mythological images through which the Vedic poets speak. UÅas becomes the sister or the enemy of the night. She is made the beloved of the Sun god, who follows her as a gallant youth follows his girl; alone or along with her dark sister. She becomes the wife, or even the mother, or the daughter of the Sun god. UÅas is not merely the goddess of the morning of each day, but is primarily and originally the first dawn of the New year.

As one who had a great possibility of becoming a mother goddess of the Vedic period, mention may first be made of the goddess Aditi. She is often, if not always, described as the mother of the gods, Devam¡t¡. She is not only the mother of the gods; she is at times described as the mother of the universe. This tradition of Aditi being the mother of the gods is found continued even in the Pur¿ as; but in the religious history of India, Aditi could not at any period establish herself as a popular mother goddess.

From the point of view of the evolution of mother worship, the most important goddess seems to be the Earth-goddess, who has been invoked as ‘the Great Mother.’ It has to be noted that
when Mother Earth is invoked or entreated, she is seldom praised alone, but is almost inseparably related with Father Heaven (Dyus); yet it has to be admitted that the greatness and grandeur of Mother Earth commanded reverential praise from her sons, with whom the offering of songs was the real worship: “Great is our Mother Earth.”

Of the other Vedic goddesses, particular mention may be made of the goddess Sarasvaté, who is one of the most important goddesses of India still worshipped widely originally, she was an important and sacred river in the Ígvedic Age, and then she became a river-goddess. The cool, transparent and tasteful water of the rivers was frequently compared to the milk of the affectionate mother, which nourished men as their best drink, both being signified by the same word Payas. This tendency of holding the rivers as mothers, coupled with the tendency to deify them, seems to have been responsible for the origin and development of the worship of the river-goddesses of India. The river Ga´g; is ceremoniously worshipped as a mother goddess.

2. ÍGD. XII.1.12.
The hymns of the Îgveda were chiefly composed for chanting at Soma sacrifices where the sacred drink was pressed and drunk and animals were offered. It was believed that the gods descended to the Sacred grass scattered over the sacrificial site and joined the worshippers in a sacrificial feast. Apparently, it was thought that the gods made themselves visible to the worshippers, and gods and men mixed on almost equal terms. Relations with the gods were generally friendly. Varu, a inspired awe and Rudra fear, but the other gods were the good friends of the men who worshipped them and sacrificed to them, and they would unfailingly reward their devotees. In general, the Êryans were on good terms with their gods.

The Sµmaveda is a collection of certain hymns and verses mostly borrowed from the Îgveda, arranged for singing in a somewhat more elaborate manner than the simple chanting of the Îgveda. Less than a hundred stanzas of the Sµmaveda are original, and this text is of interest only to specialists.

According to R.C. Majumdar,22 “thus while the Sµmaveda is very important for the history of Indian music, and throws

22. R.C.M. Majumdar, Quoted in A.L. Basham's Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism.
interesting light on the growth of sacrificial ceremonies, its value of a literary work is practically nil.” The word *sman* means tune, or propitiation. *Sêraveda* hymns were merely used for melody. These hymns were sung by a particular class of priests called *Udgatê*. The modes of singing them are two viz., *Íhagêna* also called as *Grêmagêna* and *U,yagêna* also called as *Éêra, yagêna*.

The *Yajurveda* is a series of prose formulae, later known as *mantras*, for the utterance in the course of the sacrifice. The text is found in five main collections, of which four are known as the *KêÀ, a Yajurveda* and one as the *áukla*. The distinction between the two types of collections is that the *KêÀ, a* contains, the formulas themselves, as well as brief explanations of their significance and their place in the ritual. While the *áukla* contains nothing but the formulas, with the explanations, instructions, and interpretations being reserved for an appendix, or commentary.

The fourth Veda, the *Atharvaveda*, is different in character from the other three. This Veda did not enjoy the status of sacredness in the beginning as the other three. At first only three Vedas were regarded as sacred texts called *Vedatrayê*. The *Atharvaveda* contains
a certain amount of other material, all relate to the sacrificial rituals. It has little or no relationship to the sacrifice. It is in fact chiefly a collection of spells, charms, imprecations, and incantations. Most of them are of appreciable literary value but of very little profound religious significance. They belong to a stratum in which religion is overlapped with magic.

There are spells for casting out demons that cause disease; formulas to restore the affection of a mistress whose love has grown cold; charms to ensure success in battle and in trade. Since, in most of these poems, one or more of the great gods are invoked, they must be considered religious texts, but religious on a rather low and practical level. Besides these magic-religious poems, the Atharvaveda also contains a considerable number of lengthy speculative and mystical hymns, similar to some of those in the tenth book of the Ígveda. Some of these hymns seem to continue the speculations of that book, while others branch out on new tracks.

The Bráhma, s who composed the hymns of the Atharvaveda were not sacrificial priests, and their poems, accumulated and orally edited, were not really accepted as canonical. The important texts
of the three Vedas are only classified together to constitute the place of canonical texts in the traditional systems of Indian Darśanas. The fourth Veda, namely Atharvaveda is very often relegated from the mainstream discussion.

According to the Vedic etymologist Yaska, there are only two divisions of the Vedas, i.e., the Samhitas or mantras and the Brähmas. The Brähma, as is divided into three parts, pure Brähma, as, Ēra, yakas and UpaniÀads. The Ēra, yakas formed only a part of the latter Vedas. This view has also been shared by Ēkastamba, one of the most reputed law-givers of ancient India. The famous UpaniÀads are mostly different chapters of the Ēra, yakas. The Samhitas and the Brähma, as are loosely designated as Karmakār, a, the Ēra, yakas as Upasānakār, a, and the UpaniÀads as Jñānakār, a.

The mantra or metrical portion is the most ancient, and the book or books in which the hymns are collected are called Samhitas.

There are four Principal Samhitas, viz., (1) Ígveda Samhitā,
(2) Yajurveda Sanhitā, comprising Taittiriya Sanhitā or Kaśyapa Yajurveda and Vajasaneyi Sanhitā or āukla Yajurveda, (3) Śiṣṭaveda Sanhitā, and (4) Atharvaveda Sanhitā. Besides these, there are three other Sanhitas of lesser importance, viz., the Kāśika, Kapiśhala, Kaśīha and Maitrīya Sanhitā of the Kaśyapa Yajurveda. These are collections of sacred hymns in verse of different meters, and are mostly addressed in prayer to various gods and goddesses. They are meant to be recited in different ritualistic performances, and often express the loftiest sentiments that man can feel for his deity. But as the mere recitation of these sacred texts is supposed to have a spiritual value, their application is mostly in relation to some ritual or sacrifice. Hence, they are included in the Karmakāṇa.

The Brāhmaṇas are mostly in prose, containing detailed descriptions of the sacrificial rites and the modes of their performance. According to the great Vedic commentator Śyaṅga, they contain eight classes of topics, Itihāsa, Purāṇa, Vidyā, Upaniṣad, Āloka, Sūtra, Vyākhyāna and Anvākhyāna, i.e., history, old stories, esoteric knowledge about meditation, verses of supreme knowledge, aphorisms, explanations and elaborations. Each of the
Vedas possesses one or more Brähma, as. The Ṛgveda has two, viz., the Aitareya and the Kauṣākṣi or ājñkhyja. The Śrāvaṇeda belongs to the Tj, īya or Paucavimśa. The āā•vimya is regarded as a supplement to the Tj, īya. The āā•vimya includes Adhuta, Jaiminīya or Talavakṣa, Satyayana, Ėrāya, and Vama. The Kā, a Yajurveda has the Taittirīya, which is but a continuation of the Taittirīya Samhitā. The āukla Yajurveda has the āatapatha in two collections: the Kj, va and the Mādhyanā. But the Atharvaveda has the Gopatha. Of these, the most important are the Aitareya Brähma, and the āatapatha Brähma, a, the Brähma, a of 100 paths.

The word Brahmā originally meant magical force, especially the supernatural power inherent in certain utterances. Later, as speculation about Brahmā developed, the word was applied to the ultimate impersonal being that underlies the whole universe. In these senses, it is a neutral noun, and it is capitalized to distinguish these two meanings. The word in the masculine, usually transcribed with a long final vowel (Brahma), came to mean one of the greatest of the gods, in some places and periods looked on as the high god

who developed out of the previously mentioned Prajñapatś. *Bṛihma, a, a secondary noun, derived from Brahmā, came to mean a priest only at the end of the Ṛgvedic period.*

The ideology behind the *Bṛihma, a* literature looks back to the Puruṣāsākta of the Ṛgveda, describing the great sacrifice of the primal man at the beginning of time. From this, it is clear that the universe emerged from sacrifice, and therefore, sacrifice is fundamental to the universal process.

There is also a category of text known as *Ēra, yakas, this texts, midway in style between the *Bṛihma, as* and the *UpaniĀads.* One of the oldest *UpaniĀads, the *Bahadṛa, yaka, the highest *Ēra, yaka shows clearly in its title how one class of text evolved out of the other. The *Taittirīya Ēra, yaka* of the *Kā, a Yajurveda* forms the latter part of the *Taittirīya Bṛihma, a.* But the *Ēra, yakas* contains little of the exalted mysticism of the *UpaniĀads, being mainly concerned with the same theme as the *Bṛihma, as,* the cosmic symbolism of the sacrificial ritual. They are of importance and interest principally to specialists.
The word *Upaniṣad* means literally sitting near from which is derived the sense of secret session. The *Upaniṣads* are also called *Vedānta* as they are found at the end of each *Bṛihma, as*. There are about three hundred *Upaniṣads* in all, the chief among them are *Īṣa, Kena, Praṇa Aitareya, Taittirīya, Chyndoga, Kaṭhupaniṣad*, etc. The *Upaniṣads* are the greatest manifestations of the Hindu Philosophy. They explain the relation of matter, soul and god. The doctrine of *karma*, salvation and the methods of its attainment have been fully elaborated in them. According to the *Upaniṣads* there is only one creator, who is true, who is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient.

The *Upaniṣads* fall into two main categories. The earlier ones are in prose and take the form of anthologies of the teachings of various sages. Some of these teachers are in fact gods, others are legendary seers of the remote past, but many appear to be historical figures. The earlier prose *Upaniṣads* gave way to later ones in verse or mixed verse and prose, more unitary in structure, the composition

26. A few scholars say that there are 300 *Upaniṣads* and some others claim more than 300. The most accepted number is 108.
of which continued into the Middle Ages. At present, there are about two hundred and fifty Upaniṣads claiming to belong to one or the other of the Vedas. The great commentator of the Upaniṣads, Ākarṣya has recognized only sixteen of them to be authentic and authoritative. Of these, Aitareya and Kauṭaka belong to the Ṭīrgveda; Kāṭa, Taittirīya, Kaivalya, āvetāvatara, and Nṛṣya, to the Ṛṣṣya Yajurveda; Ṣa, Bhideya, Yaka and Jibila to the áukla Yajurveda; Kena and Chīndogya to the Śrīvādveda; and Prāṇa, Mū, Śaka, Miśra and Nāsinḥtapani to the Atharvaveda.

14. Social and Economic Conditions of the Ēryans

The structure of the Ēryan tribes was patriarchal, the male being the dominant figure and holder of property in the tribe. The basic unit of the Ēryan society was the family. The family was staunchly patrilineal and patriarchal. The wife was definitely subordinate to her husband. Marriage was usually monogamous. At the time of the composition of the earlier hymns, the Ēryans were interested more in stock breeding than in agriculture, though their main source of food and measure of wealth was cattle, which
they pastured across vast stretches of the continent. That is why the Êryans followed a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy, in which cattle played a predominant part. A Vedic hymn shows a farmer praying for the increase of cattle, the warrior expecting cattle as booty and the sacrificial priest being rewarded for his services with cattle. The cow is in one or two places given the epithet \textit{aghanya}\textsuperscript{27} which means not to be killed, but this may only imply her economic importance.

The horse was almost as important as the cow, though mainly for military reasons. The chestnut horses of the Êryans, harnessed to light chariots, must have terrified their enemies. A few hymns of the \textit{Îgveda}, according to the rubric, describe a divine horse \textit{Dadhikr\,\textit{v}i}\textsuperscript{28}. The Êryans were divided into a large number of independent tribes, ruled by kings, who when not fighting the \textit{D\,\textit{s}as} or \textit{Dasy\,\textit{Es}}, were frequently engaged in fighting each other. The Vedas tell of epic battle and of gods such as \textit{Indra}, the warrior, and

\textsuperscript{27} RV. I.134.4.

\textsuperscript{28} RV. VII.44.4.
Agni, the fire deity, who consumed his enemies. The process of conquest, assimilation and accumulation may have begun in the northwest in the closing era of the Indus civilization and continued for as long as a thousand years. When the process was completed or over, the geographic focus of the hymns and early texts had shifted from the west to the middle Gaṅga valley.

Among other domestic animals, the Êryans knew the goat and the sheep, which provided wool, their chief textile. The elephant is only mentioned later in hymns, and it was rarely ever domesticated. A divine bitch, Saramī, plays an important part in a legend which cannot be fully considered. But the dog did not mean much to the people of the Ḫyādā. It also did not represent even to a kindred Êryan pastoral people, who made it a sacred animal.

The Êryans were a wild, turbulent people and had few of the taboos of later India. They were much addicted to inebriating drinks of which they had at least two, Soma and suṣa. Soma was drunk at sacrifices and its use was sanctified by religion. Sura was purely

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29. RV. X.108.I.
secular and was evidently very potent. The Eryans delighted in gambling. In the remains of the Indian cities numerous dices have been found. The Eryans have left their own record of their gambling propensities in the beautiful “Games-ster’s Lament,” one of the few predominately secular poems which by luck have found their way into the Īgveda.

The carpenters and chariot makers are frequently referred to in the hymns with much respect. There is no good reason to believe that iron was used in India at this period. Ayas, one of the terms for metal in the Īgveda\(^3\) came to mean iron at a later date. It is related to the German word ‘Eisen’ and the English ‘iron.’ But it is also akin to the Latin aes, meaning bronze. It certainly means this metal or copper in the Īgveda. No trace of iron has been found in the upper levels of the remains of the Indus culture. At this period iron implements were rare.

Eryans built their settlements of wood and they were distributed in small units, villages rather than towns, duringmost

\(^3\) Ayas, the exact metal denoted by this word when used by itself, as always in the Īgveda is uncertain.
of the Vedic period. Their houses and furniture were made mainly of wood and other perishable materials. Even now, the position has not advanced far beyond this. It was only towards the end of the Vedic period that the development of cities was resumed. It is surprising that the Ēryans, who at this period had never organized a settled kingdom or lived in an advanced city, should have conceived of a god like Varuṇa.

By the time of Brāhmaṇas, the centre of the Ēryan civilization had become the country of the Kurus and Pucilas, corresponding roughly to the modern Uttar Pradesh, while the western settlements in the Punjab were less important. Their expansion to the east had taken place and the most important states in this region were Kosala, Kujā and Videha. The main Ēryan advance at this period was down the Gaṅga valley, keeping primarily to the north of the river. During the Brāhmaṇical period, the Ēryans maintained in essentials their ethnic identity and their Vedic culture. There was considerable internal development, and, in particular, the Brāhmaṇas increased their status and strengthened their organization. The ritual was
enormously developed, and the texts were mainly concerned with this. This state organization was stabilized and developed and a variety of offices are recorded, even though their precise functions are not always clear. The political units became large and the state began to replace the tribe. There were considerable advances in material culture, as attested by both literature and archaeology.

The rapid expansion during the period of 800–550 BC had the result that the Êryans were much more thinly spread in the new territories than in the old, and they were to a great extent mixed with the pre-existing population. Here, non-Êryan tribes retained their identity and language. The influence of the pre-Êryans on Êryan culture should probably be regarded as having begun to take effect during this period and it is associated with the transition from the Vedic civilization to the later Hindu civilization. This was probably also the time when the epic traditions, later to culminate in the Mahâbhârata and the Râmâyana, began to take shape.
Resume

Certain sites in the western half of northern India also give evidence of the Harappan cultural influence on people at a lower cultural level. Ancient India made certain advances in many areas of life. By the end of the *Igvedic* period, society was divided into four great classes. The four classes are Priest (*Brjhma*), Warrior (*Kåatriya*), Peasant (*Vai‡ya*) and serf (*à£dra*). In classical Sanskrit, the word *D¡sa* regularly means slave or bondman, and *D¡si* is used in the sense of slave girl. According to A.L. Basham, the people who composed and sang the hymns were priests and sages or group of people who called themselves *Erya* and who entered India when the Indus ethic was already half deserted. The authors of the Vedic hymns were *Eryans*. These Vedic hymns were known as Vedic literature. Vedic literature is the most important and valuable contribution of the *Eryans* to the Indian culture.