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THE HISTORY AND CULTURE
OF THE INDIAN PEOPLE

THE VEDIC AGE

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tion. Varuṇa was the chief of these ethical deities just as Indra was the chief of the older nature-gods.¹²

The fact that about 1400 B.C., in the well-known treaty-record discovered at Boghaz-köi, the *Daiva*-gods Indra and Nāsatya appear side by side with the *Asura*-gods Varuṇa and Mitra, clearly suggests, as Christensen¹³ has pointed out, that the antagonism between the worshippers of the *Daiva*-gods and the *Asura*-gods—which is the central feature of early Indo-Irānian history—had not yet broken out. But it was in full blast long before the advent of Zarathustra whose Gāthās should be dated about 1000 B.C. on linguistic grounds, as shown in the preceding chapter.

The antagonism between the worshippers of the new gods and the old must have been one of the main causes of the estrangement and subsequent secession of those Aryans who later conquered India, but their antagonism was not confined to the field of religion alone. Christensen¹⁴ has suggested that the *Asura*-religion was practised by the more cultured and steadier elements of the primitive Indo-Irānian society whose chief occupation was agriculture and cattle-breeding, while the older *Daiva*-religion continued to find favour with the more vigorous but less civilized portions of the people to whom the primitive predatory habits were more congenial: the former were content to remain behind in Irān, but the latter, urged by the spirit of adventure, advanced farther east and at last entered India. But all of those who remained behind were not *Asura*-worshippers, nor all of those who braved the hardships of the forward march into India were adherents of the *Daiva*-religion. The *Daiva*-inscription of Xerxes,¹⁵ discovered in 1935, clearly shows that even so late as the fifth century B.C. *Daiva*-worship had to be forcibly suppressed within the Achaemenian empire. And in India we meet with the curious situation that in the oldest period all the great gods received the title *Asura* as a decorative epithet, though later it came to be used exclusively as a term of abuse. In innumerable passages in the Brāhmaṇas the *Asuras* have been represented as superior to the *Devas* in the arts of civilized life, and both in Vedic¹⁶ and Puranic tradition they are regarded as the elder brothers of the gods. They are as far above the *Dāsas* and *Rākshasas* as the *Devas* themselves.

All things considered, it seems difficult to deny that along with the great horde of *Daiva*-worshipping Aryans came to India also a culturally superior strong minority of *Asura*-worshippers, whose cult and religion was slightly different from that of the former and who were for that reason ceaselessly cursed and condemned by the Vedic Aryans, more out of jealousy, it would seem, than out of contempt. For if the Vedic Aryans intentionally suppressed all reminiscence of the Indo-Irānian original home, as suggested above, would they not also have suppressed the memory of the *Asura*-worshippers in the same way if they could? But