CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
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The work entitled A Socio-Cultural Study of the *Rgvedasamhitā* concentrates on a survey of the *Rgvedasamhitā*, which is one of the prominent works in the vast Vedic literature. The Vedas are considered as the compendium of Indian culture and civilization where the socio-cultural life of the then Indians are prismatically reflected. Everything relating to the Indian way of life has its roots in the Vedic lore. The most important as well as the most ancient of all the works in the Vedic literature is the *Rgvedasamhitā*, which is a collection of *rks*, i.e. the panegyrical verses devoted to various gods and goddesses, praising by the Vedic seers their mighty deeds. The *Rgveda* is the very foundation of the entire Vedic literature. The purpose served by the *Rgveda* is of invaluable importance, as it gives valuable information regarding the details of the history and civilization of ancient India. The *Rgveda* has long been known as an authority for the study of ancient Indian culture. It gives a clear idea of the civilization of a very remote past by representing people's life and culture, which is not to be found anywhere else. Ludwig holds, 'The *Rgveda* presupposes nothing of that which we know in Indian literature, while, on the other hand, the whole of Indian literature, and the whole of Indian life presuppose the *Veda.*' (Vide, Winternitz, M., *History of Indian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 60) Every aspect of Æryan culture is preserved in the hymns of the *Rgveda*. The information about the household life, customs, culture, education, occupations, polity, religion etc., which reflect the picture of the socio-cultural condition of the then India, is enshrined in the *Rgvedasamhitā*. The thesis divided into six chapters, embodies all such important aspects of the culture and civilization of the then India as revealed in the *Rgvedasamhitā*.

Amongst the Vedas, the *Rgvedasamhitā* is regarded as the oldest extant *Veda*. There are several commentaries on the *Rgveda* of which some are already lost. The commentary of Sāyaṇācārya is a learned one. The present study on the *Rgvedasamhitā* mainly analyses, in detail, the views and interpretations of Sāyaṇācārya as given in his commentary on the work and the society of then India as reflected there.
The study comprises six chapters. The First Chapter is the Introductory chapter which deals with the prominence of the Rgvedasamhita in the Vedic literature. The position of the Rgveda in the whole Vedic literature, its date and priority are dealt with, in detail, in this chapter. The term veda primarily stands for the knowledge par excellence and secondarily it means the whole range of Vedic literature, viz. Mantra, Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka and the Upaniṣad. Mantra literature forms the oldest part of the Veda and contains its kernel. From the very beginning, the Mantra or metrical portions were collected in the form of Sarīhitās. Mantra or Sarīhitā is four in number, viz. the Rgveda, the Sāmaveda, the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda. Of these four Sarīhitās, the oldest at the same time the most important is the Rgvedasamhita, simply called the Rgveda. It belongs to a period thousands of years far removed from the present people. The prominence of the Rgveda in the whole range of the Vedic literature is dealt with in this chapter. The Rgveda presents a variety of themes. There are lyrics of various kinds, dialogues, ballads, legends and myths, spells, doxology, philosophical speculations, hymns dedicated to nature and various other subjects. Besides supplying information on such topics, it includes a mass of material which helps to form an idea regarding the past history and daily life of the Rgvedic Āryans. So, the Rgveda is regarded as the compendium of all knowledge to trace the history and civilization of the then India.

Various scholars have put forward their views about the probable age of the Rgveda, which are dealt with in this chapter. The Rgvedic recensions, its division of the contents into maṇḍala and aṣṭaka and the arrangement of the different maṇḍalas, which are of varying length and attributed to different seers are also discussed here. The hymns of the Rgvedasamhita represent compositions of different periods and are of varying degrees of literary merit. Among the ten maṇḍalas, the first and the last one having the same number of hymns are stated to have added at a comparatively late period. The earliest and the core section comprise maṇḍalas two to seven, known as the Kulamaṇḍalas or the ‘Family Books.’ These Maṇḍalas are homogenous in character. Each one of these maṇḍalas contains hymns ascribed to seers belonging to a particular family of the Vedic age. The eighth maṇḍala known as the Pragātha maṇḍala is the production of different families of seers, among which the Kanya family predominates. The eleven Vālakhilya hymns are inserted in the middle of this maṇḍala. The ninth maṇḍala, popularly known as the Somamaṇḍala or Pavaṁanamaṇḍala, having more number of hymns than the eighth one, bears its own
peculiarity, as it contains exclusively hymns which glorify the Soma, the sacred drink and are dedicated to the god Soma. The tenth mandala includes hymns of miscellaneous character that covers a wide range of materials, i.e. cosmogony, cosmology and philosophical speculations, wedding, burial rites, spells and incantations, dialogue hymns, praise of some abstract deities. That this mandala is a late addition to the contents of the Rgveda is derived from the frequent use of the Post-Vedic Anuśṭubh metre, which is a peculiar feature of this mandala.

The literary value of the Rgvedasamhitā is also noted here. Different elements of poetry, i.e. figure of speech, imageries, metres, sentiments, etc., are interspersed in the Rgvedic hymns. There is a broad discussion on the nature of the Rgvedic hymns. The hymns of the Rgveda can be divided into three classes, viz. the religious hymns, the secular or non-religious hymns and the philosophical hymns. All those hymns, which are addressed to divinities, containing an eulogy of them and requests for the granting of their desired object, are included in the religious class. The secular or non-religious hymns of the Rgveda deal with social customs, liberality of patrons, ethical values, dialogues, riddle and monologues etc. A good number of hymns of the Rgveda deal with the formulas of incantations or magical practices, which are treated widely in the Atharvaveda. Many hymns of the Rgvedasamhitā intend to trace the Vedic cosmological and philosophical ideas. The influence of the Rgveda on later Vedic literature, which borrowed most of their materials from the Rgveda, the commentaries on the Rgveda, works of both eastern and western scholars on the Rgveda, its editions, etc., are dwelt upon in the last part of this chapter.

The Second Chapter is entitled 'The Socio-Economic Aspect of the Rgvedasamhitā.' First of all it deals with the concept of class distinction in the Vedic society. Caste distinction had not yet developed in the Rgvedic society. However, the Purusāṣṭuṇḍa mentions the name of the four principal castes, viz. the Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra. The rigid distinction of caste was not seen in the Rgveda as found in the later Rgvedic age. It is found that classes existed in the Rgvedic society, but they had not yet strictly developed into caste distinction. In comparison to other classes, the Brāhmaṇas enjoyed more privileges in the society because of their mental, moral and spiritual qualities. There was freedom and mobility for the lower class to become member of the higher class. The Rgveda is silent about the idea of impurity and prohibition and it can be undoubtedly
stated that the Südras did not form a class of untouchables in the society. Besides the four classes, the \textit{Rgveda} alludes to other groups of people like the Dāsas and Dasyus, the fivefold Āryan people, known as – \textit{pañca\=janāḥ}, \textit{pañcakṣitayaḥ}, \textit{pañcacarṣanyah}, \textit{pañcakṛṣṭayaḥ} etc. The prominent groups of people, viz. the Anus, Druhyus, Yadus, Turvasas, and the Pūrus are also referred to. \textit{Āśramadharma} is one of the important foundation stones of the Vedic social system in which the entire social life depends. The four Āśramas or the four stages of life viz. \textit{Brahmacarya}, \textit{Gārha\=sthyā}, \textit{Vānaprastha} and \textit{Sannyāsa} and their duties are mentioned as depicted in the Rgvedic texts, though these are found, not fully developed during that age. During the Rgvedic age, joint family system was prevalent. As the patriarchal society, the birth of a son in the Vedic society was welcome in a family. In the Rgvedic society women were treated with mixed feelings. In certain circumstances women were found occupying a dignified position in the society and in other places they were looked down upon also. Position of women during the Rgvedic period is delineated with regard to the birth of a girl, female education, role of women in the family, age of marriage, religious rights and privileges, property right, position of widow, remarriage of widows, system of \textit{niyoga} etc. Status of a woman as a mother and wife was an honoured one. The role of woman as a wife was recognized as much praiseworthy. She was a true support to her partner in every walk of life. The high position of the wife is shown by the fact that she participated in the sacrifices with her husband. Religious rights and privileges accorded to women and their role in religious practices and observations throw immense light on their position in the society. The morality of the Rgvedic people seems to be fairly high as an unmarried daughter is given the share of paternal property in the Rgvedic society. Though there were no provisions for formal education for women in the Rgvedic society, it can be held that the level of education for women was considerably high, as they received physical, intellectual and spiritual training. In the Rgvedic society, women were given considerable freedom of social life. It is to be noted that there was no purdā system. But prostitutes and courtesans were not wanting in the society. Cases of conjugal unfaithfulness and sexual immorality were also not rare.

Thereafter follows the discussion on the system of Education in the then Indian society. A due place was given to education in the life of a man. In ancient Indian society, there was no formal educational institution for the students. About the method of learning, the \textit{Mandūkasūkta} (R.V., 7.103) clearly indicates that the basic method of learning was
learning by rote under the direct instruction of teacher. The teacher recited the hymns, and the disciples repeated them after him as a frog croak one after another. It cannot also be said that the knowledge of writing or aksaras was unknown to them. Moreover, emphasis was given on the understanding of the text rather than mere recitation of it without insight into the inner meaning. Role of Saríghas and Yajñas in imparting learning are noted in the Rgveda. Education in the Rgvedic age helped in the all-round development of the personality of a student. In the Rgvedic educational system, a harmoniously balanced emphasis was laid on the religious, social and cultural aspects of the life of an individual to develop a broad and humanitarian outlook of the students. In the Rgvedic period the syllabus to be studied appears to have been very vast. There existed different branches of knowledge. The knowledge of elementary astronomy, nakṣatras, medical science, basic sciences like agriculture, animal husbandry, art of warfare, arts and crafts, etc., are referred to in the Rgvedic passages. There was no restriction about receiving education, as it was not confined to any caste.

The Rgveda enjoins the manners, customs and aspirations of the Āryans. Among the religious customs, the marriage and funeral rite find distinct mention in the Rgveda. The Rgveda affords information about the custom of marriage, which was well-established in that period. The features of marriage ceremony, gifts given in marriage, different forms of marriage prevalent, i.e. Svayamvara, Gāndharva, Rākṣasa, Asura, Brāhma, etc., are discussed. Incest was considered a great sin. In the days of the Rgveda, monogamy was the rule, whereas, polygamy was an exception. Though polygamy was practised in the Rgvedic period, it was recognized that plurality of wives never contributed to domestic felicity. Polyandrous relationship was not totally unknown to the Rgvedic seers. The Rgveda alludes to rites connected with the funeral ceremony. These lend insight into the customs and manners of the Āryans regarding the disposal of the dead body. Cremation and burial was practised. The Rgveda enjoins the rite Pitṛmedha, to be performed in the cremation ground. The Rgvedic verses enjoin the ethical and moral concepts. It lays stress on speaking of truth and righteousness. Hospitality and kindness was considered as a noble duty. They even believed that the performance of charitable acts lead one to long life and immortality. The Rgvedasamhitā also enjoins the code of conduct for the promotion of co-operation, fraternity and brotherhood in the society and aimed at maintaining the economic and social equality in the society. Standard of morality was considerably high. They were aware of sin
and immoral acts. Unrighteous actions were condemned and even considered as sin or evil. Adultery and rape were considered serious offences, while illegitimate birth and robbery were counted as punishable crimes. Then an account of everyday life and the standard of living of the ancient Indians is furnished in this chapter. Art and architecture was developed in the Rgvedic age, which is gleaned from the references to various kinds of houses, big residential houses and palaces, fortified palaces, ramparts, iron forts and cities, castles hundredfold, autumnal forts, construction of ports, ships or boats etc. The articles of daily use like furniture, dress, ornaments, food and drinks are also thoroughly discussed. Various kinds of domestic furniture and utensils used in day to day life as well as sacrificial purposes are mentioned. In the Rgvedic period, people wore various types of clothes, made of bark, skin, wool and cotton. They were interested in wearing ornaments like mani or jewel, gold ornaments or other metallic ornaments, garland for decorating themselves. Hair dressing was practised by both the sexes. Various items of food and drink were used, viz. barley and its various preparations like Purodāśa, Apūpa, Karambha, etc., dairy products like milk, ghee and curd, meat, fruits and vegetables, drinks like milk, Soma juice, Surā, honey etc.

The Āryans of the then Indian society were rich in the arts and amenities of life. The Rgveda speaks of dice-playing, racing, hunting, music, dance, playing on musical instruments as the means of entertainment and amusement.

The Rgvedasamhitā also refers to economic life of the Āryans during that period. In the last part of this chapter, discussions are made on the economic life of the then Indian society. It is a fact that all kind of progress depends on the economic stability of the society. People were free enough to choose their occupations, because the occupations prescribed to the four varṇas had not yet developed in the society. It is found that Agriculture and Cattle-rearing were the principal means of livelihood. Cows and bull appeared to have enjoyed special importance in the Vedic society, which were of great use both for the agriculture and for the performance of daily and the seasonal sacrifices. The Āryans of the then Indian society earned their livelihood by dint of labour in the field of making chariots, jwellery, ship-making, house-building, fort-making etc. Arts and crafts like carpentry, weaving, metal-work, pottery, leather-work were known to the Rgvedic people. There are references to trade and commerce, transport and communications. Moreover, blacksmith, physician, barber, usurer were also there in the Rgvedic society. Thus, there existed a well-balanced economy in the days of the Rgveda.
The Third Chapter entitled ‘The Political Aspect of the Rgvedasamhitā’ gives an idea of political system of the people of that age. In spite of the religious character of the Rgveda, there are references to polity, which give insight into the political life of the people. In this chapter, the political aspects like king and kingship, qualities of the king, his manifold duties, powers and limitations, position of the king in the kingdom, the ruler and the ruled, their mutual relations, administrative measures, the royal Purohita and other officials of the king, popular assemblies like Sabhā and Samiti, etc., their role, the royal consecration, means of fighting and the art of war are directly dealt with. In the Rgvedic age, kings were variously designated as Rājā, Samrāt, Adhirājā, Ekārāt, Svarājā, which indicate their height of power and prestige. The kings were given so much importance that they were compared with the gods of the Vedic pantheon, viz. Varuṇa, Agni, the Maruts etc. During the Rgvedic period, the form of government was monarchical in nature. The rulers were said to be of illustrious family line. By virtue of his hereditary right, a king was succeeded to the throne. Sometimes the election of a king was also alluded to, which occurs in case of the absence of a befitting successor. The condition of a country entirely depends upon its political system. The king was the head of all matters in the Kingdom for which he must be qualified enough. Several officials of the king like Purohita, Grāmaṇi, Senānī, Vṛājapati, Kūlapati, Viśpati, Purpati, Kṣattr, Dūta exercised great influence on the smooth functioning of the administration. Among them, the Purohita was the sole associate of the king as his preceptor, guide and philosopher. The king was not only a ruler but he acted as judge also and gave judgements of various cases. To punish the criminals was one of the important duties of the kings. The king was the upholder and guardian of law and order. He also exercised the supreme command in war. The last part of this chapter has furnished a very valuable and elaborate account about the system of warfare. The army composed of rathins, i.e. the warriors who fought from chariots, and infantry or the foot soldiers. Cavalry was also a part of army, used in warfare. Chariots were considered indispensable in the Rgvedic warfare, which is clear from the hymns addressed to war-chariots. The Rgvedic people were aware of the principles and strategies of war for the destruction of enemies or to ensure victory over hostile combatants. War instruments and banners were used in warfare. Moreover, the hymns of the Rgveda allude to different instruments like bow, arrow, sword, spear or lance, quiver, vajra, etc., and armours like drāpi, siprā, etc., which were used in warfare.
The Fourth Chapter is entitled 'The Religious Aspect of the Rgvedasamhita.' At the very beginning, the concept and the definitions of religion formulated by the scholars are discussed. Among the different theories about the origin of Rgvedic religion, the 'theory of Naturalism' is held by most of the scholars of the Vedas. The phenomena of nature were the objects of worship to the Āryans and they conceived the existence of supernatural powers in all such things. The attitude of reverence impelled the Vedic seers to glimpse law in the world of nature, from which sprang the Rgvedic religion. Deities and sacrifices formed the nucleus of the Rgvedic religion. Many deities are referred to in this work. On account of the mention of a great number of deities, one is tempted to mark that the Rgvedic religion was a polytheistic one. But a progression from polytheism to monotheism and then to monism is traced. The present chapter discusses in detail about the origin of gods, concept of god, etymological meaning of the term deva or devatā, particularly given by Yāska and others. Concept of dual deities, female deities, group of gods, minor divinities, demons, Apsarases, Gandharvas, malevolent spirits, abstract deities, as found in the Rgvedic passages are dealt with in this chapter. Existence of divinities was believed not only behind the natural phenomena but in the inanimate objects also. The pressing stones, wood, trees, weapons, the plough, the furrow, sacrificial implements, sacrificial posts, divine doors of the Sacrificial hall, and every idea of mind are conceived as divinities, as they were thought of bringing about good or evil influence on man. Animal worship forms an important part in the Rgvedic religion. People attributed divinity to the animals like the Cow and Horse, which give rise to various forms of animal worship. But the Rgveda is silent about the worship of the serpents. Discussion on the sanctity of waters and rivers follows thereafter. The Āryans conceived the waters as pure and they believed in the efficacy of such waters in removing the sin of the people. The rivers were implored for protection, nourishment, pleasure and felicity. Worshipping of mountains finds place in the Rgvedic religion. Reverence to the Pitṛs or ancestral spirits, their characteristics find mention hereafter. The remaining portion of this chapter deals with the modes of Āryan worship, where ritualistic performances comprising sacrifices or Yajñas formed an important part of the Āryan religious practices. The Rgvedasamhita does not mention temples or pilgrims nor the worship of idols. The sacrifice played an important role in the days of the Rgveda. The gods were duly invoked in the sacrifices and given oblations of various kinds of materials. The materials used for oblation consisted of the major products of agriculture and cattle-breeding. There are stray references to human sacrifice in the Rgvedic age, in addition to the sacrifice of
animals and the offering of other oblations like Soma, honey, Gavāśira, Kārambha etc. The priests played the major role in the performance of the sacrifice. A large number of priests and their assistants were employed for the performance of the sacrifice. The highest number of priests required for a sacrifice was sixteen. Of these, four priests, viz. Hotā, Udgātā, Adhvaryu and Brahmā officiated as the main priests. They had their own assistants to help them in the course of sacrifices. The priests, in return, used to get Daksina or sacrificial fee as their professional charges. Designations of the priests and their role in the sacrifice as the mediators between the people and the divinities are marked well in the Rgveda. People aspired to get reward from sacrifices and the gods in their return, bestowed prosperity, immense wealth, long life, sons and cattle, etc., to the worshipper. Moreover, the sacrifice, when performed by the individuals, is said to bring happiness and spiritual enlightenment. The Rgvedic culture aims at the uplift of the whole society and the individual. A sacrifice was considered to be the surest means of spiritual enlightenment and attainment of the heaven. The performance of the various kinds of sacrifices shed ample light on the development of the sacrificial cult during that age. One of the important characteristics of the Rgvedic religion is that the Āryans had some popular beliefs and they believed in the efficacy of magical rites. Views regarding the destiny of the human being after death and immortality of the soul, conception of heaven and hell, theory of rebirth and karma, etc., are dwelt upon in the present chapter. The last part of this chapter deals with the philosophic revelations of the Rgvedic seers. The query regarding the origin of the universe, the relation between sat and asat, concept of the Jīva and Brahma, the idea of one Supreme Being ruling the whole universe are dealt with in this chapter, and it is derived that the Upaniṣadic concept of Monism has its root in the Rgveda.

The Fifth Chapter of the present work is entitled ‘Geographical Information as recorded in the Rgvedasamhitā.’ A thorough study at the subject matter of the Rgveda reveals that it contains much information on the geographical aspects of the then India. It is noticed that Sapta-Sindhu Pradesā was the cradle of Āryan culture and civilization in the age of the Rgveda. Different views and opinions of the scholars are put forward regarding the location of ancient India. Different classes of people, viz. the Āryans, the Dāsas and Dasyus, Paṇis, etc., different groups of people, among which the Anus, the Druhyus, the Turvasās, the Yadus and the Pūrus were prominent, are traced. The geographical data gleaned from the Rgvedasamhitā shed light on the physical geography of the then India. There are references to forests and desert places. Mountains are also alluded to. Among
such mountains, the most important one was the Himavat, i.e. the Himalayas, which finds mention frequently in the later literature too. Besides, Mujavat is noted for the Soma plants. Nothing is known exclusively about the Vindhya range from the Rgvedic verses. Reference to ocean, their identification and location, sea navigation during the Rgvedic age are dealt with in this chapter. The rivers flowing through the region are frequently referred to in the Rgvedic verses. Views regarding the identification of the seven rivers are discussed here. The rivers that are mentioned in the Nadiśūktā and their identification are dealt with in detail. The Rgvedic hymns furnish the idea of the climatic condition of the then India which was under the influence of seasons like Hemanta or winter, Grīṣma or summer, Vasanta or spring, Sarat or autumn and Śīśīra or cold. It is known that due to the existence of sea and the rivers, the region was affected occasionally by heavy shower of rain. Flora and Fauna find special mention in the Rgveda. The last part of this chapter furnishes the rich vegetation of the Rgvedic India. The important types of flora found in the Sapta-Sindhu, i.e. the trees, plants, herbs, creepers and grasses etc., their identification and uses are taken into account thereafter. The Rgvedic accounts furnish that domestic animals, wild animals, reptiles, various species of small insects and birds were known to the Rgvedic seers.

On the whole, it can be deduced that the importance of the Rgveda is immense from the point of view of socio-cultural aspects. Much about the ideas and thoughts prevailing in the then society can be gleaned from the Rgveda, as it furnishes valuable information about the life and culture of people during that age. It can be said that the Rgveda occupies pioneering position in the whole Vedic literature for it gives the first impetus to the ancient Indian culture, its philosophical ideas, political institutions, religious beliefs, code of conduct, fine arts, flora and fauna and so on and so forth. As the Rgveda provides guidance in tracing the social, economic, political, religious and geographical aspects of the then Indian society, it is the infallible source of information of the socio-cultural history of India. The Rgveda forms the basis of the Hindu way of life even today. Most of the precepts, rituals, moral principles contained in this Veda are still much followed by a large number of people in India. Thus, the Rgveda is a valuable work in the Vedic literature and regarded as a very important source of socio-cultural study. The high ideals and ordinances embedded in the hymns of the Rgveda are precious enough to be followed by all, and these will hold good for all time to come.