PREFACE

The Vedic literature is the oldest Indo-European literary monument, where the cultural heritage of the people of the then India is reflected. The whole Vedic literature occupies a very important position in the study of the socio-cultural history of India and its religion. The four Vedas, viz. the *Rgveda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Sāmaveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, which constitute the Vedic literature, are said to be the marvellous treatises of knowledge. The Vedas with their infinite branches of learning touch the perfection in every department of knowledge. Among these four monumental works, the *Rgveda* is said to be the most important as well as the oldest one, for it is the very foundation of Vedic literature. It holds a unique place in the whole range of the Vedic literature. The *Rgveda* is composed of one thousand and seventeen verses which are mainly devoted to the praise of different gods and goddesses. The hymns of the *Rgveda* give information about the earliest form of civilization. It has long been known as the authority for the study of ancient Indian culture and throws a flood of light on the various aspects of early Vedic culture. The *Rgvedasamhitā* reflects different aspects of society of the Vedic Aryans. The socio-economic condition of the then Indian society is also reflected here. The *Rgvedasamhitā* also contains materials regarding the political aspect of the ancient Indian society. This *Veda* contains valuable records regarding the religious and geographical information of the then Indian society. The data furnished by this *Veda* are of no less importance for the study of the socio-cultural history of India.

Thus, the *Rgvedasamhitā* furnishes the knowledge of the religion, faith, ideals and secular aspects of the life of the Aryans. The *Rgvedasamhitā*, a very important source of study of the past history attracts the researchers of the present time. Therefore, a keen interest developed in me for an intense study of the work and thus a humble attempt has been made to prepare a thesis on the topic entitled — A Socio-Cultural Study of the *Rgvedasamhitā* for the degree of Ph.D. of the Gauhati University.
Though many works have been carried out on the *Rgveda* till date, the present thesis is an endeavour to bring out the hymns in a fresh outlook. There are some extant works on the various aspects of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. But, all the aspects of the socio-cultural elements are not dealt with in a single work. It has been, therefore, aimed to prepare a synthetic and comprehensive thesis entitled—A Socio-Cultural Study of the *Rgvedasamhitā* in the light of Sāyanācārya’s commentary, which ventures for an indepth study of the socio-cultural aspects, after analyzing the relevant materials contained in this *Veda* in a fresh light.

The present work entitled A Socio-Cultural Study of the *Rgvedasamhitā* is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction, which deals with the prominence of the *Rgvedasamhitā* in the Vedic literature. This chapter discusses the various aspects of the *Rgvedasamhitā*, i.e. its priority and date, recensions and division into *aṣṭaka* and *mandala*, arrangement of it, its literary value, nature of the hymns, influence on later Vedic literature, commentaries and editions etc. The second chapter presents a detailed note on the socio-economic aspect of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. Class distinction, different classes or groups in the society, the four Āśramas or the four stages of life, family life, son in the *Ṛgvedic* family, position of women, system of education, different customs like marriage ceremony and funeral rites, manners and morals, everyday life like dress, ornaments and decorations, food and drinks, arts and amenities of life, other means of recreation, art and architecture, domestic furniture and utensils, economic life, various occupations and duties of the Vedic people, etc., are discussed in this chapter. The third chapter throws light on the political aspect of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. The Kingship, concept of Rājan or King and various epithets of King, concept of divinity in Kingship, position of the King and his majesty, formation of government, duties of the King, his powers and limitations, sources of income of the state, the mutual relations between the ruler and the ruled, officials of the King and their duties, popular assemblies, its role, etc., are discussed. The last part of this chapter deals with the art of warfare and composition of army, principles and strategies of war, various weapons and armours useful in the warfare, banners and warfare music, etc. The meaning of the term religion, Vedic concept of religion and its definitions, nature of the *Ṛgvedic* religion, theories regarding the problem of gods, concept of god, their origin and specific characteristic features, worship of various natural elements, modes of worship,
popular beliefs and practices prevalent in the society, etc., are recorded in the **fourth chapter**. The second part of this chapter sheds a good deal of light on the eschatology, transmigration, *karma* and rebirth and the philosophic revelations of the Rgvedic seers. The **fifth chapter** gives information about the geographical aspects as recorded in the *Rgvedasamhitā*. It contains records about the centre of Āryan culture, inhabitants, physical features, climate, flora and fauna, etc., of the Rgvedic age. The **sixth chapter** contains a concluding remark on the work. Here, in the concluding chapter of the thesis an overall idea of the *Rgvedasamhitā* regarding the socio-economic, political, religious, geographical aspects of the then Indian society is analyzed.

The present work entitled *A Socio-Cultural Study of the Rgvedasamhitā* mainly analyses, in detail, the views and interpretations of Sāyaṇācārya on the work. While pursuing my study, I have based on the *Rgvedasamhitā* with the commentary of Sāyaṇācārya, in five volumes, published by the Vaidika Saṃśodhana Maṇḍala, Poona in 1972. I have consulted the *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, in two volumes, attributed to A.A Macdonell and A.B. Keith, published by the Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi, 1982. Moreover, I have gone through the English translations of this work done by R.T.H. Griffith and H.H. Wilson entitled *The Hymns of the Rgveda*, published by the Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi in 1976 and *Rgveda Samhitā* in seven volumes published by the Nag Publishers, Delhi in 1990 respectively.

It is the result of my academic pursuit for last six years under the supervision of my revered guide, Prof. Manjula Devi. I shall feel rewarded if this work can arise some interests in the minds of the readers. As I conclude, I am really conscious of the probable shortcomings in the work.

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(Barnali Deka)