PREFACE

Society and culture are two closely related concepts. Obviously, no literature can flourish without the influence of a society. Literature informs us of the culture of a society of the place and time to which a writer belongs. Therefore it is rightly stated literature is the mirror of society. Bhāsa’s dramas appear to be the first aesthetic attempt to represent and symbolize a society of his age. They faithfully reflect the socio-cultural conditions of his time and this is one of the reasons that they have been attracting the interest of the students and researchers in the field of Sanskrit literature through ages. This very subject has also arrested my attention to carry out a research project on it. In the present research work our endeavour will be to show what socio-cultural set up India had during the time of composition of Bhāsa’s Mahābhārata based dramas in particular, viz., Madhyamavyāyoga, Pañcarātra, Dūtavākyā, Dūtaghāṭotkaca, Karṇabhāra, and Īrūbhanga. Pending a detailed and serious discussion on the subject concerned, we may take note of the fact that the society represented in the six plays under consideration seems to be comparatively a primitive one. Hope our present work will be a valuable addition to the socio-cultural study of ancient India of the period to which Bhāsa pertained.

The present work entitled ‘A Socio-Cultural Study of Bhāsa’s Dramas Based on the Mahābhārata’ is divided into five chapters, each dealing with a separate aspect of our life. The opening chapter of the work deals with Bhāsa’s date, his works and a brief introduction to his six plays based on the Mahābhārata. After critically reviewing the existing materials at our hand, it is assumed that the compositions of the thirteen plays took place in the period between 4th to 5th centuries B.C. However, the literary evidence to his works was brought out for the first time by Mahāmahopādhyāya T. Ganapati Śāstri in the year 1912. The socio-cultural aspects like system of caste, four stages of life, position of women in society, geographical data, flora and fauna etc. are discussed in Chapter II, while the chapter III deals with the political and military conditions like polity and government, duties of a king, war and weapons etc. as reflected in these plays. The
fourth chapter presents various religio-philosophical aspects like rites and rituals, beliefs and practices, rebirth, incarnation of Viṣṇu and so on revealed in the six plays of under consideration. A summary of all the preceding chapters has been given in the concluding chapter, i.e., chapter V.

With these prefatory words, I now humbly present this dissertation for its appraisal. However, I am not sure for its intrinsic advantages until it is approved by the prudent.

Date: 09/09/2016

(Pallabi Dutta)