

Reviewing the Mahabharata

Ramkrishna Bhattacharya

The *Book under review is a product of long and painstaking study of the Poona Critical edition of the *Mahabharata*. The work is divided into eight chapters dealing with administration, economy, religion, warfare, customs, social system, literature (inscriptions, legends, references to the Vedas and Law-books, etc.) and women as reflected in the epic. It also provides a synoptic Concordance of the critical edition, the Bombay edition and the Calcutta edition of the *Mahabharata*, Parvan by Parvan, which will prove to be of immense help to scholars. The word Indes, however, leaves something to be desired. If the entries were arranged alphabetically, locating references would have been facilitated.

Sen has approached the *Mahabharata* not with any sense of devotion but as a source book of informaton of ancient Indian life and manners, particularly in relation to society, both of the aristocrats and the commoners. He has not let any bias to impair his objectivity. Every aspect is treated strictly on the basis of evidence found in the constituted text of the epic. Sen has also made use of Buddhist sources and secondary works, such as those by E Washburn Hopkins and Adolf Holtzmann, who, he says, inspired him most.

The work is a veritable treasure house of information which will be invaluable to all students of the *Mahabharata*. Everything that the author states is properly documented. The last chapter on women should be read both by the activists and scholars in the field of women studies. The chapters on religion and literature are of special interest to the students of Indology in general. The chapter on Social System should be of special interest to the anthropologists for the long section on castes. That the Sudras were mercilessly exploited is crystal clear from the evidence that Sen has gathered. In this respect the *Manusamhita* and the *Mahabharata* are on the same wavelength.

The book reads well for the easy and matter-of-fact style of presentation. The get-up, printing and the quality of paper are excellent, although proof-reading errors are quite frequent. The use of diacritical marks is also somewhat erratic.

We hope the work will be well received in Indological circles. Common readers interested in the social history of ancient India, too, will be profited by reading this book.

**The Mahabharata : A Social Study*. by Chitrabhanu Sen,
Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 2005. Pages 270+I-X (Index). Rs. 600.00. ✍