

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapters show that the tradition of the *carita-kāvyas* has happily percolated down to the present age. The *carita-kāvyas* form a part of biographical literature. Most of them are not biographies. In the present thesis, the poems which are entitled *caritas* are only included. We have not therefore included the biographical *kāvyas* like *Indirājīvanam*, *Jānakījīvanam* etc. It was known that the biographical literature has remained practically the domain of the poets and has been treated as a branch of the *belles lettres*, like poetry. Notwithstanding the unkind charge that “India has no historians and no historical sense”, the tradition of writing versified biographies of eminent personages is rooted in antiquity. The earliest such attempt is the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghōṣa. The poem seeks to detail the life account of Lord Buddha from his birth to the attainment of enlightenment. Padmagupta Parimala’s *Navasahasāṅka-carita*, Bilhaṇa’s *Vikramāṅkadeva-carita* and others of their like combine to perpetuate the tradition, though they are primarily intended as *kavyas* embellished by all the trappings sanctioned by theory, with the result it is the form that dominates the narrative and historiography, not often, is pushed into cussed oblivion. This is precisely what accounts for the failure of these so-called ancient biographies to meet the purpose they are intended to serve. They are essentially *mahākāvyas* far removed from the modern

concept of biography, their nomenclature (*carita-kāvya*) notwithstanding.

The poets of modern age have followed the tradition but with certain modifications. While attempting biographies of the stalwarts like Gandhi, Subhas, Bhagat Simha, Nehru et al the modern poets have been chary of avoiding the pitfalls that stalked their predecessors. Some of them alive to the requirements of modern biography that invariable insist on the measured but elegant presentation of the narrative. Outer trappings are relevant to them to the extent they serve to enliven the otherwise insipid narrative. The cautious effort to strike balance between the form and content has resulted in the emergence of a number of *carita-kāvyas* that come close to the modern concept of biography. They are distinguished by a full fledged depiction of the *carita* of the person concerned without overburdening it with such embellishments as combine to turn history into fiction. While this aspect of Sanskrit biographies has resulted in the introduction of poetic fancies and exaggerations in their compositions the fact that biographers in Sanskrit, especially the early ones, have composed long after the lifetime of the persons concerned, has had the effect of introducing into them much legendary matter and hearsay accounts. In the modern period when the norms of western biographical writing began to seep into India, its impact also began to be felt by the Sanskrit writers. The vision of the Sanskritists widened and as a result, they began to view men and matters in more realistic perspectives with a critical eye and an enquiring spirit. The prevailing nationalist movement too had its effect on them. Thus, while they

took up for portrayal prominent personalities from all walk of life they also took pains to collect data from diverse sources and set them out in an objective manner, to form authentic biographies. However, it has been noted that in spite of these efforts, there still remain in these works traces of classical presentation germane to Sanskrit poetic tradition. This aspect apart, the substantial biographical literature produced in Sanskrit during modern times may be taken to represent a welcome diversion from the biographical writings produced in the earlier phase. This tradition of *carita-kāvya* in Sanskrit is unique and appreciable for many reasons.