

7

THE SOVIET SCIENTIST TRANSLATING MAHABHARATA.

By,

Nikolai Elizov.

Professor Vladimir Kalyanov, one of the best known Soviet Sanskrit scholars, has his headquarters in the Institute of Oriental Studies, of the Academy of Sciences, U.S.S.R in Tashkent.

The Academy of Sciences has given him the task of making the first complete Russian translation of the Indian national epic, Mahabharata. I called on the professor who is short in stature, is rather stout and looks quite young, although he has published quite a number of monographs and papers on culture, customs and languages of ancient India. He has earned great reputation by his work of editing and preparing for the press a Russian translation of the Arthasastras (politicco-economic treatise on Ancient India)

"I am very glad to be given an opportunity to work on the translation of Mahabharata", he told me. "Think it is a very important work, especially as it is only the second complete translation of a poem into any European language. Until now the Mahabharata has been translated only into English with some extracts from the poem in Russian, French and other European languages.

Mahabharata is the work of second millenium B.C and I consider it one of the greatest of literary works of all times and all peoples". Continued the professor, "it is a work not only of the Indian people but one of which the whole world may well be proud".

The professor stressed the point that the Mahabharata sings the praises of the best qualities in man: love of country, bravery, courage in battle, faithfulness to friends and striving to assist the weak: all of which is very real and topical in our days when the progressive peoples of the world are fighting against the dark forces of fascism. At the same time the poem is an encyclopaedia: a key to the understanding of the social, economic life, the science, art and language of ancient India from contemporary sources.

"It is not by any means an accident that the second complete translation of the Mahabharata is being made into Russian", said the professor. "The Soviet people have always displayed great interest in the history of ancient India, one of the cradles of civilisation".

Professor Kalyanov is using two editions of the poem - the Calcutta edition of 1834 and the Bombay lithographed edition of 1836.

"In making the translation I am not only trying to reproduce each line with the maximum of accuracy, but also to retain the style of the original in all its freshness and clarity. This task is made easier by the fact that Russian, like Sanskrit, is a highly inflected language, so that the two languages have much in common in their structure".

"What difficulties do you find in translating?"

"The difficulties are many but they arise, like conditions which help to simplify my task, from the character of the Sanskrit language. Compound words and absolute constructions in the poem are very difficult to render into Russian.

There is another difficulty caused by the war, and that is that I have ~~not~~ not got all the volumes of the third complete edition issued by the Bhandargar^R Oriental Institute in Poona. This edition of the Mahabharata is considered to be very valuable, because the translators give ~~various~~ variations of some parts of the poem, and provide excellent notes and commentaries".

"When do you expect to finish the work?"

The translation of such a monumental work as the Mahabharata with its 18 books - 19, if you count the foreword dealing with the genealogy of the House of Vishnu - is beyond the power of one man or, at any rate, would be the work of dozens of years. I am, therefore, training a group of my pupils who will partake in the translation under my guidance. Working collectively, I expect to get the translation finished in a short time and give the Russian reader an opportunity of reading the Mahabharata - one of the most beautiful gems of Indian literature.

At the present time I am finishing work on the first book of the poem, "Adiparva", after which I will start on the second, "Sabhaparva".

The professor also told me a few details about life in Tashkent. Before the war the Institute of Oriental Studies was in Leningrad, but when the Germans tried to seize the city in 1941, the institute was evacuated to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan.

The state and the scientific institutes of the Uzbek Soviet republic have paid considerable attention to the needs of the Institute and helped the professors to continue their work under suitable conditions.