

OLD PORTUGUESE TRANSLATIONS OF MARATHI LITERATURE IN GOA : c.1558-1560

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TODAY WE POSSESS the treasures of the very extensive Indian old literature in great collections or even in individual editions largely in the original languages or in translations. It needed several centuries before the various difficulties, not only of a linguistic nature, were overcome. First of all, the Brahmans and the other religious writers most jealously guarded their literary products. Thus, for example, it was strictly forbidden to teach Sanskrit to the lower castes. Vṛddha-Gautama condemns to hell all those who sell the Veda,¹ and Aparārka appeals to Caturvimpśatimata, which prescribe various *prāyaścittas* (penances) for selling the Vedas, smṛtis, itihāsas, purānas, etc.

When finally the Gāyatrī was made known to the missionaries at the beginning of the 17th century, and they inquired about the meaning of the sacred words, they were informed that these signified nothing² which of course was not true. In general, the Europeans,—first of all the Portuguese, then the Dutch in the 16th and 17th centuries,—came to know the Indian literature not through the Sanskrit works but through the adaptations in the vernacular languages or Prakrit. It was only Robert de Nobili in the 17th century who first ventured into the Sanskrit texts. As said before, it was difficult to come by the original texts. In 1548, in the island of Divar, the Portuguese came to have possession of a basket full of heathen books, as the expression runs. The bishop of Goa, Juan de Albuquerque handed them over to Paul's College there for deciphering, but it seems, there was no one who could set about the job. Great success came ten years later when once again a number of books were discovered in the vicinity of Goa, and there was also a translator found who translated them from Marathi into Portuguese. These translations are found today in the General Archives of the Jesuits in Rome,³ and some of them, as second copies, in the Biblioteca Publica at Evora, Portugal.

From contemporary reports of Jesuits we also learn of some circumstances of how it happened. Peter de Almeida reports at the end of December 1558, how one night some Jesuits made a search of houses for images of idols and evidence of superstitious

* This translation is based on the German text read at the Congress of Orientalists, Paris in 1973. J. Wicki is in charge of editing documents referring to Jesuits in India. He has published 12 volumes of these under the title 'Monumenta Indica'.

1. P. V. Kane : *History of Dharma Shastra, II* (Poona 1941) 349.

2. Diogo Goncalves, *Historia do Malavar*, 57.

3. *Codex Goa*, 46, 348-94.

ceremonial practices, and how in doing so they found two books of over 100 folia each in the possession of a distinguished Hindu. In these books, called *Anādipurāna*, the creation of the world and the avataras of Vishnu were described. The Hindu was taken captive and sentenced to four month's imprisonment in the house of the prisoners of the king of Portugal.

We learn more still from the famous historian of the Mission of Japan, Luis Fróis, who a year later wrote about the case to Europe. A young brahman, very well versed in Hindu law, had been in touch with the Jesuit Fathers from Goa and had already promised them that he wanted to be a Christian. But one day he disappeared into the inner part of the country without leaving any trace. He later returned unexpectedly and got himself baptized as Manuel de Oliveira. Now one day in the company of some friends, he went back to the mainland, where in the night he surprised a certain Brahman, a staunch defender of Hinduism, who during eight years had taken great pains to copy and compile from various authors the works of their chief prophet Vyāsa. According to Oliveira this Vyāsa wrote 18 books—to one Vyāsa are ascribed the 18 books of Mahabharata, likewise to another Vyāsa the 18 Puranas. To this author the distinguished brahman had added still other authors. His whole library was collected by Oliveira and brought to St. Paul's College in Goa in order to be studied there. For some days Manuel worked at translating the most important texts. Then he went to the Franciscans who wanted to take along some sections of these texts to their mission in Ceylon. As soon as the texts were translated by the Jesuits they were sent to Portugal by two or three different ships according to the order of the Provincial, and these too in the form of copy books. As mentioned before, one copy of them is to be found today in Evora, while another found its way to Rome. As Fróis then wrote apologetically, the texts were copied by young students, and there was not enough time to polish up the translation and compare it with the original. That explains much, but not everything. The well known Orientalist Jarl Charpentier laments that in Fenicio's work about the Indian sects, many Indian names and words have been mutilated to such a degree, that one can hardly or only with great trouble identify them. This applies in a certain sense even to our translations.

The texts are somewhat badly arranged. I will try to present them in a more orderly way. First of all we are introduced to the "invisible, eternal, almighty, all-bountiful, glorious and gentle" Parabrahma, who then created the gods Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma as also Satī. He tried to marry this daughter Satī to Brahma, and then to Vishnu, but both of them refused. So finally she became the wife of Shiva. Each of these three gods established himself in his own paradise. Then follow the ten avataras of Vishnu. In the 2nd, that of the tortoise, the story of the two door-keepers of heaven, Madhu and Kaitabha, is inserted. In the 4th, the Man-Lion avatara, there is the story of Hiranya-kashipu. In the 6th, the Rama avatara, is the speech about the 'cow of

desire' (*kāmadhenu*), which is stolen by the king, who, however, loses his life. In the 9th, of the Buddha, there is an addition about the Jainas, who are said to be the enemies of the brahmins ; and in the 10th, the Kalki has still to come and to be circumcised.

One long section deals with the brahmins and yogis. At the age of seven the young brahmin receives the sacred thread, and must eat "silently," for twelve years, study the four Vedas and learn the Gāyatri. As gr̥hastha (married man), he has to promise to follow the Smṛti and the writings of the Saptar̥shis. After 12 years he becomes a vanaprastha, a forest dweller. The sanyāsis wear yellow clothes, are divided into four grades and have to serve only Vishnu. The last stage is that of a yogi or avadhūta. Its members do not return any more to the world after death, while all the rest have to be reborn. There follows an interesting passage from the most famous poetical creation of India, the Bhagavad-gītā, which is ascribed to Vyāsa, although the real author has not yet been established with certainty. By way of introduction, it should be noted that Krishna is the 8th avatara of the god Vishnu, and instructs Arjuna. Vyāsa wrote the text in a "dark" (obscure) language (Sanskrit) which no one could fully understand. Finally came another prophet, Dnyāndev (Dnyāneshwar), who clothed the poem in verse which at least some could understand. The teacher of the poet was called Nivṛtti. Then follows in a free manner an extract from the Bhagavad-gita, as Dnyāneshwar in his 13th book expounded it : thus, explanations about the human body, the six philosophical systems, the soul, the five senses of man, in a special manner and in detail about jñāna (*wisdom*, also translated as divine or perfect grace) and about total indifference towards earthly things, which signifies abandonment to parabrahma. A comparison with the English translations of the Sanskrit text shows that the Portuguese text essentially agrees with them in content and sequence, though much of the picture has been given another explanation or has not been quite rightly understood, and there are some passages which are missing in the English translations.

The most interesting writing of these Portuguese translations could nevertheless be the treatise of Yogarāj-tilak, known as "Hiogirazaticu", which was unknown even in the Marathi region. On the basis of our translation, it was finally found there in various copies and published. This writing is ascribed to the great teacher Dattātreya and contains 330 verses. Since he possessed sure knowledge about the "salvation of the souls", (*sic* in the text!), the writing had a great prestige among the heathens (*i.e.* Hindus). It is a graceful dialogue between the teacher Dattātreya and his pupil, the brahmin yogi Amṛtānanda, about the most important questions of life and has a monotheistic (monistic?) trend. Amṛtānanda throws himself at the feet of the master and begs him for instruction about how he, through this life which is a stormy ocean, could get to the haven of deliverance. To that he receives the answer : good works help little towards

obtaining deliverance and besides they are not needed because these men, who perform good works, have to be born again. Only the knowledge of *parabrahma*, who is inconceivable, unique, very bountiful, unending, without beginning and incomprehensible, could deliver men. Then follow explanations about Shūnya (the nonentity), creation, the fourfold way of progress, about body and soul with the inner and outer organs. These discourses end with a warning, not to worship the three gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva through cultic acts. Contrary to expectation the dialogue then proceeds to deal with the subject-matter in which the life of the yogis is glorified and the identity of the soul with *parabrahma* is emphasized. At the end the most important teachings are once more inculcated upon the grateful pupil. A number of notes in the margin of the text try to clarify the difficult expressions of the technical language. These notes are not always precise as should have been expected. But they are nevertheless relevant, as a serious attempt to penetrate the Indian world of philosophical ideas.

It would be exceeding the scope of this paper to name all the authorities who are met with in these treatises. Besides Vyāsa we often meet Nāmdev (in his "trovas" or *abhangs*), the unnamed writers of *Viveka Sindhu*, *Siddhānta*, *Anādi-purāna* (now lost?), *Kāshikānda*, *Sāmkhya sūtra*, and *Brahma-sūtra*. As the oldest Marathi poet comes Dnyaneshwar who lived at the end of the 13th century, and is the author of *Dnyāneshwarī* and other works which are all enmeshed in Vedānta philosophy. He is a monist and defender of advaitism (pure non-duality). He fights against idol-worship, and stands for the equality of men. As the second Marathi poet is to be mentioned Mukundarāj, whose name, it is true, is not found in our texts, but his work *Vivekasindhu* is. All his ideas are drawn from the same leading theme, that of Vedānta. He stands indeed below Dnyandev in ideas, expression and clarity; yet he made a name for himself through his musical rhythm. The third in the line is Namdev, a tailor by profession, who died in 1350. Only some of his *abhangs* have come to us. He too belongs to the Vedānta philosophy school and condemned idol-worship. One does perceive in him the influence of the Mohammedans from Delhi since Vishnu is circumcised as Kalki. In our text a lost *Anādi-purāna* is also ascribed to him.

If we wish to have an overall impression of these texts, it will become undoubtedly clear, that all of them belong to the Vedānta system of Indian philosophy, which among the six orthodox systems occupies the last place. To explain that more in detail here would lead us too far. Yet it may be remarked, that in the spirit of that epoch the learning of the missionaries about the mysteries of India was interested more in attacking the adversaries than in discovering the positive elements in their philosophical intuitions. In any case, the translations during the 16th century are interesting even today for Indologists. These translations will appear in the "Archivo Italiano per la Storia della Pieta" Rome.