

# Report on electronic *Mahābhārata* project

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The purpose of the project was to bring into being a complete, accurate electronic text of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*: first the main text of the critical edition, then the major variant passages relegated to appendices in that edition. The main text was to be corrected from an existing, seriously inaccurate text whose origin I explained in my application for funding; the appendices were to be typed up from scratch.

My view is that the project has been very successful indeed. The quality of the work submitted by the assistants, who initially found their task a difficult one, improved substantially with practice and supervision. Serious use of the resulting text suggests that residual errors are now very sparse — perhaps one per hundred lines of verse or better. Work on typing up the appendices has only started on a trial basis, since the main text has not yet been completed, but the results indicate that the accuracy rate here should if anything be even higher.

The only problem that has arisen which seems worth reporting is the timescale. It very quickly became clear that my estimate of six months to complete the entire task was seriously over-optimistic. The assistants have no background familiarity with computers (or even typewriters); the power supply is erratic; working hours are rather shorter than in this country and public holidays rather more frequent; people get ill from time to time. Luckily the equipment cost somewhat less than I had estimated (a consequence of world-wide falls in the price of such equipment), and I have been able to continue paying my assistants' salaries from the money saved under this heading. Unfortunately it will not be sufficient to bring the entire project to completion: I have applied to a local Cambridge fund in order to make up the shortfall, and I am confident that the application will be successful.

The likely conclusion date for the project as a whole now looks likely to be the end of 1999. However, the main text will be ready to go online in late 1998 or early 1999.

The Society's contribution of £4,000 towards the project was earmarked for the purchase of equipment. I have already sent the Treasurer a statement of account showing how that sum was spent, so I shall not give any details here. I am most grateful for the Society's help with the equipment costs, an item which many funding bodies (e.g. Leverhulme) simply refuse to consider.

Finally, I would add that the electronic text is already in use — by me, as I work on my Penguin translation — and that a further, more 'scholarly' use of it is planned in the form of a further research project in collaboration with the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. An application for funding to assist in getting this project under way is included with this report.

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