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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR
REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

National Report on Standardization of Geographical Names in India**

Paper presented by India

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National Report on Standardisation of Geographical Names in India

INTRODUCTION :—India is a vast country with Hindi as the national language. English is a link language and is to continue for quite sometime. Many regional languages are prevalent in the country but only fifteen of them have officially been recognised in our Constitution. Some more languages are, however, likely to be added in the near future. Sanskrit has either given birth to or influenced other Indian languages.

Any system of transliteration of names cannot satisfy fully the needs of all the languages of the country but can achieve substantial amount of results in standardisation of geographical names. All the Indian languages are phonetic in character and their names are also picked up in the field by the Surveyors in phonetic terms which are later transliterated into Devanagari or Roman. With the improved standard of education, particularly in English and Hindi, better awareness and understanding in picking up of names and transliteration of names is possible. Quality of picking up of names can be considerably improved by providing continuous and persistent guidance to the supervisors involved in field and office treatment in transliteration viz. standardisation of geographical names. Names falling in the multi-lingual belts can be picked as phonetically decipherable, in both the languages and thereafter transliterated. In the course of office treatment the difference between the two transliteration can be reconciled to accept the most suitable transliterated names keeping in view the background of language, history, usage, names appearing in the State or National Gazetteer and other revenue records.

2. HISTORY OF PLACE NAMES :—Place names in India as they stand today, have undergone a good deal of change as a result of impact of historical events. Tribal languages, Dravidian influence in the South, influence of Sanskrit, Islamic influence etc, were the factors in the evolution of place names which were named after hills, wild animals, types of forests, rivers, local deities,, local heroic persons etc. These names were subsequently subjected to anglicised accent.

3. STANDARDISATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES :—As per resolutions passed earlier in U.N. Conferences for standardisation of Geographical names, the Government of India initiated the matter and issued the undermentioned guidelines to achieve the desired objectives :

- (a) Authority to determine the spelling of any name in the script used as the official language of the Centre will vest in the Central Government.
- (b) All Ministries of the Central Government and subordinate offices will observe the spelling approved by the Central Government.
- (c) The Survey of India (National Mapping Organisation) will be the only authority for the transliteration of names from one script to another according to the system approved by the Central Government. In the event of disagreement between the Survey of India and a State Government, the decision of the Government of India will be final.
- (d) Where a State Government uses a script (other than the Devanagari script) which differs from that used by the Central Government or where a local script of the State differs from the script used by the Central Government, the State Government will be the authority for deciding the spelling of geographical names of places or features in the State in local

script. Survey of India will be responsible for transliterating these names into Devanagari or Roman script in accordance with the approved system of transliteration and in consultation, where necessary, with the State Government and other appropriate authorities.

- (e) State Government will have full authority, where they adopt Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language or even where Hindi is only a local language of the State Government, to give names to places and natural features within their areas hitherto unnamed. Such names will be communicated to the Survey of India in the Devanagari script for transliteration to the Roman script. Should it be necessary to alter the existing spelling in Devanagari script of a name in use by the Survey of India, the State Government will ask the Survey of India to adopt the new spelling. If the Survey of India is unable to agree, the State Government may refer the matter to the Central Government for a decision. This procedure will apply also to changes in the spellings of names that appear in the Gazetteer of India.

3.2. Standardisation of geographical name is the process of giving a standard spelling in the official languages out of various alternatives. In a multilingual country like India where there are fifteen recognised official languages, this process would consist of first deciding the name in the official language of the State and then transliterating into Devanagari, English and other languages in accordance with the approved system of transliteration. The system of transliteration should thus be a reversible one so that no distortion occurs in original spelling during transliteration.

Our present system of transliteration i. e. Hunterian system, does not meet the present day requirements of India and suffers from certain drawbacks. In pursuance of resolution 12 of the 3rd Conference, system of transliteration¹ of geographical names and other similar proposals are under the active consideration of Government of India and decision in this regard is expected to be taken in the near future.

4. EXONYMS :—In pursuance of the resolutions 18 and 19 of the Third Conference, India has been making efforts in reduction of Exonyms. India is a vast country consisting of people of diverse languages and dialects and the names in official records have often anglicised accent and are not related to phonetic names of the area. India believes in gradual erosion of exonyms so that sudden discarding of conventional names of long universal standing does not create chaos, therefore printing Standardised Geographical Names on maps with Exonyms in Parenthesis is desirable during the transition period. There is always a procedural delay in changing names and exonyms, nationally and internationally well known, because it involves deep study of historical and cultural background and consultation at various levels/departments and finally between State and Central Governments. The process of reduction of exonyms in India has, therefore, been continuous but slow.

We have so far been identifying and discarding glaring exonyms on the spontaneous and natural urges of our people rather than formal preparation of such lists. In this way, progress has been speedier than it would have been, had we entangled ourselves in time-consuming procedural wrangles of formal preparation of lists. The latter task according to us is of next priority.

5. FEATURES BEYOND SINGLE SOVEREIGNTY : --In case of names falling across or along the border or common to the countries, it is ideal that the nationally accepted names of both the countries

1. Colonel Sharma's transliteration table.

are adopted till a reconciled name is jointly agreed to by both the Governments. In view of this we have been printing on our maps and documents alternative names accepted by us and locally known in the other countries within parenthesis. It will be advisable that names of such features are compiled centrally and reconciled with the adjoining countries, in course of time. In case of names falling in other countries of the world, it would be ideal if nationally accepted names and subsequently the names adopted by the United Nations Organisation are accepted as Standard Geographical Names for all purposes.

6 NAMES OF MARITIME AND UNDERSEA FEATURES :—In view of increased ocean research activity necessitating standardisation of names of maritime and undersea features, India is keen to associate with International Hydrographic Organisation in nomenclature of maritime/undersea features within her territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. Such names are under compilation of Government of India and we hope to submit the same to International Hydrographic Organisation and the working group on the undersea and maritime features, before the next Conference.

7 NAMING EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL FEATURES :—Space exploration research programme has recently assumed considerable significance for the entire mankind. The previous conference had recommended a world-wide participation in involving a procedure for naming extra-terrestrial features so that succeeding generations did not inherit a confused nomenclature. Thus, the naming of extra-terrestrial features is a complex matter and falls within the ambit of United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical names who should associate with International Astronomical Union and draw guidelines in consultation with NASA and other space agencies engaged in extra-terrestrial mapping,

In order that nomenclature of extra-terrestrial features may be acceptable to all the nations, commemorative naming, using names of famous scientists and artists is suggested. As the stock of such commemorative names is limited, assistance of all the member nations of United Nations is called for in assisting the Working Group in the feasibility of using terrestrial geographical names and ordinary words selected from the languages of the entire world, India will be glad to associate with the task and hopes to submit concrete proposals in this regard in the near future.

8. AUTOMATED DATA PROCESSING :—India is aware of the fact that some countries have developed a program of automatic processing of information on Geographical names where computer programs maintain Master Name Files under various groups (e. g. Cultural, Rivers, Mountains, Railways, Airports, Administrative, etc.) which can be updated through corrections, deletions, additions and the system can provide print-outs of name information according to various formats (e.g. alphabetically by feature, drainage, administrative partitions etc. with coordinates, altitude and brief description). Efforts in this direction are under consideration in India too.

The 3rd Conference had recommended that the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical names should consider the problem of compatibility of systems on geographical name information of different nations and compatibility of output media generated by automated data processing so that geographical name information could be made available to international users in other than printed forms

India looks forward to the report of United Nations Group of Experts to provide necessary guidance in this regard so that we may depute suitable officers to attend courses on the subject with advanced countries, in order to introduce the system in India as per our requirements.

9 TRAINING IN TOPONYMY :—A suggestion has also been made to train our personnel in toponymy. Efforts are being made by us in educating the supervisors in the science of toponymy so that they could bring uniformity and standardisation of names in field treatment as well as in office treatment while transliterating the names. With the extensive use of transliteration tables prepared by Col. Sharma and amended subsequently it is felt that this aspect of toponymy will be covered in course of time. Possibility of running a course of toponymy in Survey of India is under active consideration in the Department.

10. GAZETTEERS :—Imperial Gazetteers continue to be the primary authority for the spellings of geographical names in India. However, these publications pertain to pre-Independence era and contain inaccuracies in the spellings of names, which are being rectified from time to time in accordance with our prescribed procedure. Government of India has decided to replace the Imperial Gazetteers by the four volumes of Gazetteers of India. As a first step in this direction, the whole of India after independence has since been remapped on topographical scale of 1:50,000. Thus latest versions of names are available in vernacular. These maps with appropriately transliterated names now constitute the basic authority for the spellings of Geographical names. Government of India (Survey of India) has already changed and notified 469 names between 1947—1973, and published a booklet under “List of changes to Important Names, Second EDN. 1974” and this process is continuing, to publish the 3rd Edn. with all the names changed with reference to Imperial Gazetteers or otherwise to ensure appropriate use of these standardised names in future.

11. NAMES AUTHORITY :—Collection of geographical names in India has so far been carried out by Survey of India at the time of topographical field survey work and Government of India have formulated certain guidelines for determining the spellings of geographical names, for naming a new place, changing existing name, etc. Although these arrangements have been working satisfactorily, yet she considers it desirable to have a machinery at State level for standardisation of names in the local languages paying due regard to historical, cultural and other backgrounds, with the ultimate aim of universal acceptance of the name. Therefore, in pursuance of U.N. Resolutions on the subject, Government of India proposes to set up “State Names Authority”, in each state, headed by concerned minister and assisted by representatives of departments like Revenue, Land Records, Languages, Tourism, Survey of India, etc. Details of functions proposed to be entrusted to such a body are briefly enumerated below :—

- (a) Research and investigation into names of geographical entities falling wholly within the boundaries of the state and standardisation of these names and spellings in the State Language.
- (b) Giving names to new villages/townships and other geographical entities.
- (c) Scrutiny of proposals for alteration of existing names and processing these in accordance with Government of India guidelines and forwarding them for decision of Central Government.
- (d) Publishing a list of standardised geographical names and ensuring their use by the Government agencies and public concerns.
- (e) Acting as a clearing house for information pertaining to geographical names.
- (f) Transliterating geographical names falling outside the State into State language according to the approved system of transliteration.

(g) Coordination and cooperation with the adjoining states in standardisation of names.

After eliciting and processing the views of various State Governments/Union Territories, the "State Names Authority" is likely to be constituted in the near future by an executive order.

12. GLOSSARY OF NAMES :—It looks to be good idea to improve usefulness and utility of maps and ease of location of these names and locations on the map particularly in Geographical maps at small scale. A selective glossary of standardised names of important names could be printed on the map or the document with the map to provide guidance to persons using the maps for final location of the name place, locality, Hill Range in which the map user may be interested as well as to know the standard name. We had a trial run on 1:50,000 scale maps for which comments have been sought from various users. These will be discussed and policy decision taken thereafter.

13. CONCLUSION :—Correct name information is of paramount importance because toponymic information with local prefixes and suffixes helps a researcher in reconstructing and identifying the geographical conditions of the past and in tracing the historical, cultural and economic aspects of the region. Place names are like fossils which provide an insight into the past. All pictorial representations on maps are meaningless without place names providing material for research and study.

Place names in their vernacular or colloquial versions have a characteristic warmth of their own. This forum is thus of great international significance in its untiring attempt in devising a foolproof system of name standardisation because distorted versions of names would be misleading to the scientists, geographers and historians.
