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THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN INDIA

Paper presented by India*/

*/ Report prepared by Col. D.N. Sharma Atri Harnal. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Government of India.

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1.6 Perhaps this was inevitable. It is doubtful if name standardization can ever be possible without maps, and mapping in the modern sense, started in India with the advent of Europeans in the early part of the 18th century. As the British established and extended their rule, they carried out surveys of their new possessions to ascertain the extent of cultivated lands and the value of their revenues; for the protection of communications; and for the extension of their new found empire. Rennell was appointed Surveyor General from the beginning of 1767 and mapping of the country was taken up in earnest. First surveyors were British who were not familiar with Indian languages. Indian pronunciation of names was alien to their ears. They anglicised the names and gave many of them a mnemonic form. Thus Siraj-ud-Daulah became Sir Roger Dowler; Karachi - Crotch; Allahabad - Isle of Bats; Lakhimpur - Lucky-poor; Mahesh-ūru - Mysore; Sundarbans - Sundry-Bunds; Hajipur - Hodge-poor and so on. The confusion became worse confounded when the same name was spelt in many ways according to the idiosyncrasies of individual surveyors. For example, Sind was spelt as Scinde, Scind, Scindh, Sindh, Sinde and Sind.

1.7 Following factors were evidently responsible for causing this confusion and anarchy in the Roman spelling of geographical names:

- (a) Mishearings and garblings of surveyors not conversant with local languages and dialects.
- (b) Lack of a uniform and standard system of transcription of Indian phonemes and transliteration of alphabets of Indian languages into Roman.
- (c) Inherent shortcomings, inconsistencies and absurdities of English orthography.

1.8 To set the matters right, the Government of India, in 1868, decided to compile provincial gazetteers throughout India and appointed Dr. W.W. Hunter to develop a uniform system of transliteration and to secure uniformity of spelling in the preparation of these gazetteers. His system of transliteration was approved by the Government in 1870 and with a few minor modifications it has been in use since then.

However, prior to the Independence of India, English alone was the official language of the Government of India and the Hunterian system served the needs of the English knowing people adequately. The question of publishing maps in Hindi and regional languages never arose. Hindi in Devanāgarī script has now taken the place of pride as the official language of the Government of India and the Constitution of India also recognizes 13 other languages as official. Some more are likely to be added in the future.

1.9 It has, therefore, become advisable to replace the Hunterian system by a more comprehensive system of transliteration which should also have the quality of reversibility. To assist in this matter, Colonel D.N. Sharma Atri Harnal, who represents Indian Division in the United Nations Group of Experts of Geographical Names, prepared tables for "TRANSLITERATION INTO ROMAN AND DEVĀNGARĪ OF THE LANGUAGES OF THE INDIAN GROUP" which were approved by the Group and adopted for use in international cartography by the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in London from 10-31 May 1972 by Resolution 11. These have since been slightly revised and are under the active consideration of the Government of India. It cannot be disputed that in a multilingual country suitable transliteration tables enabling transliteration from one language to the other are the essential first step towards standardization of geographical names.

2.5 Changes in spelling of existing names

In order to preserve historical continuity and avoid confusion, it has been decided not to change the existing English spelling of some internationally known places and features, e.g. Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi even though they may have slightly different local pronunciation. The Roman spelling of the geographical names appearing in the Constitution of India are to be retained unless changed by the Government of India.

As a result of historical processes, some names undergo minor changes which are noticed when these places are revisited for the purpose of revision surveys. Their spelling is corrected.

In the case of names appearing in the Imperial Gazetteer/Gazetteer of India, a minor change or inaccuracy in the spelling of a name, which comes to notice during field surveys is made in consultation with the State Government concerned. In the case of a major change the State Government is required to refer the matter to the Central Government.

In some cases, spelling of names may have to be corrected due to incorrect spelling having been initially adopted by mistake, or some place having undergone a change in the name. In such cases, the old name is inserted in brackets and is dropped only when it falls in disuse.

2.6 Giving a new name to a place already named

The policy of the Government is to discourage changing an accepted name which people have got used to. Names of villages etc. having a historical connexion are not allowed to be changed as far as possible. A change is not allowed to be made merely on grounds of local patriotism or for linguistic reasons, i.e., villages cannot be renamed after national leaders merely to show respect to them or for satisfying local sentiment in the matter of language, etc. Any such changes can be made only with the approval of the Central Government which generally consults the Surveyor General of India.

2.7 Field collection of geographical names and standardization of their spelling

The Survey of India is responsible for the collection of geographical names and rendering their spelling in Devanāgarī and Roman. While the surveyor is carrying out surveys in an area, he enters the names of places and geographical features, indicating the extent of the latter, in a register. He writes the name in any Indian language known to him, adhering faithfully to the local pronunciation, as the main aim is that the map should be able to guide the individual to the place named. No attempt is made to trace the etymology of the name or its historical origin. The spelling of the name picked up by the surveyor is finalized after consulting the local administration who maintain revenue records. The spelling, if not in Devanāgarī, is at first transcribed into it and then transliterated into Roman. In some States which have not yet adopted Hindi for official use, the names are transcribed into Roman from the regional script. A sample form on which names are collected is attached.

2.9 Features having more than one name

When a feature, like a river or a mountain, extends over a wide distance or area, it may have a variety of local names. In such cases, the more important name is shown boldly and the local name is given in brackets alongside, in the part to which the latter pertains.

2.1.1 Features extending beyond the frontiers of India

Within the Indian territory, our practice is to adopt the Indian name, and beyond it, the name adopted by the country concerned. To avoid confusion and for international reference, it is very desirable that names of such features should be standardized. Although it is difficult to make the inhabitants of an area adopt a new foreign name for such a feature, the standard name could be shown alongside the local accepted name at least on all official publications.

3. Gazatteer of geographical names

In India, geographical names appear on Survey of India maps and in the Gazatteers of India. Although gazatteers of well-known places and features have been compiled in the past, no comprehensive gazatteer of all the known geographical names has as yet been compiled.

4. Glossary of geographical terms

The compilation of a glossary of internationally accepted geographical terms will be of great benefit, especially for navigational purposes and delimitation of territorial waters, etc. The Indian delegation lends full support to this project.

5. Foreign names

Survey of India now enters both the conventional name of a foreign country and the name which the country has adopted for itself, the latter is entered within parenthesis.

भारतीय सर्वेक्षण विभाग
SURVEY OF INDIA

सं. No. पार्टी PARTY () बॉटि सं. Sheet No.

प्लेन-टेबल सेक्शन सं. Plane-Table Section No. जिला District. सब डिक्विजन्ट Sub Division
सर्वेक्षण कर्ता Surveyed by सीजन Season 19

स्थानीय लिखित		शिविर अधिकारी द्वारा वर्णविन्यास		विवरण Description	मकानों की संख्या Number of Houses	तहसील, तालुक आदि Tahsil, Taluk, &c.	अस्थिर R.E.M.A.R.K.S
स्थानीय भाषा Vernacular as written by a local official	अंग्रेजी English	अंग्रेजी English	देवनागरी Dovanagri				
3	4	5	5a	7	8	9	10

के वर्णविन्यास इम्पीरियल गेजेटियर से लिए गये हों, रेखांकित किए जाने चाहिए। सातवें खाने में लिखा जाना चाहिए कि क्या नाम शहर, गाँव, नहर, पहाड़ी, नदी, झील आदि किस से सम्बन्धित है। आठवां खाना शहर, यह सूचना उनके सापेक्ष महत्व के निर्धारण के लिए आवश्यक है। दसवें खाने में यह लिखा जाना चाहिए कि शहर, गाँव, आदि में क्या बाजार, अस्पताल, डाकघर, ताड़, पुलिस स्टेशन, डक, बंगला आदि हैं।
 spelling of which has been taken from the Imperial Gazetteer, should be underlined. In column 7, it should be stated whether a name refers to a town, village, temple, hill, river, lake, &c. Column 8, this information is required to determine their relative importance. In column 10, it should be stated whether, in a town, village, &c., there is a market, hospital, P.O., F.O.P.S., D.B., &c.

Surveyor तारीख Date स्थानीय अधिकारी के हस्ताक्षर Sig. of Local Officials तारीख Date
 P. Camp Officer पार्टी के कर्तबगारी अधिकारी के हस्ताक्षर Sig. of C.O. Party तारीख Date