

PROPOSAL FOR A NATIONAL
TRANSLATION MISSION

BY

NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE
COMMISSION

Proposal for National Translation Mission

1st September 2006

The National Translation Mission (hereafter NTM) would urgently take up the task of identifying gaps, promoting good quality translation, training, disseminating information about translation and translators, and co-ordinating ongoing work by public and private organisations. As an activity, translation has been going on between different pairs of languages in the Indian subcontinent for a long time. Translation, as a passion, has seen many great minds in action in different speech communities in India and elsewhere. As a profession, translation is challenging and becoming more lucrative, particularly in recent decades. As a field of research, Translation Studies seem to have emerged as a field with numerous ideas emanating from linguistics, philosophy, literary studies, semiotics, lexicology, anthropology, computer science, and a host of other fields. But considering its spread across a large number of languages, cultures and nations, the field still seems to be lacking in efforts at coordinating its activities.

As a multilingual and multicultural country, and as one of the oldest knowledge bases, India has been in the forefront of translation for many centuries. With many languages and cultures, this country also provides a rich testing ground for all major theoretical initiatives in both literary and machine translation. It is expected that the proposed NTM will fulfil a long-felt need that would satisfy different segments: teachers, learners, language technologists, business groups, newspaper establishments and other media groups, creative writers, readers, those engaged in comparative studies and translation theoreticians.

The NTM will have the following objectives:

1. To act as a store-house of information on translation involving Indian languages, and to make information regarding all aspects of translation available – by creating, maintaining and constantly updating information on translations published, training programmes scheduled, translation tools and instruments available and new initiatives, and facilities such as a ‘National Register for Translators’.
2. To work as a clearing house for all translation activities, both theoretical and practical, in as many Indian languages as possible;
3. To provide links between users of translated material at different levels and in different activities to the public and private agencies and organisations and individuals involved in translation and translation-related activities involving Indian languages;
4. To prioritise the translation of pedagogic materials at all levels (including primary onwards to tertiary education) specifically in natural and social sciences;
5. To project Indian languages and literatures in this region and abroad through high-quality translation;
6. To create and maintain various tools for translation, and to especially encourage the preparation of bilingual and multilingual bi-directional general as well as special-purpose translational dictionaries, word-finders, and thesauri; and

7. To promote printed as well as virtual publication of works on Translation Studies jointly or independently for the benefit of all institutions and individuals interested in the field.
8. To provide a forum for dialogue by creating a bulletin board for people to post questions and answers.
9. To provide guidance in the methodology of translation and undertake activities to enrich teaching and training activities in translation studies.

Key activities of the proposed National Translation Mission

1. Translator education.

This reflects the fact that while translation requires bilingualism as a necessary condition, it is a specialised function that cannot be assumed and some features of which must be learnt. In addition, different types of translation work require different skills – for example, translation of scientific or technical works requires very different skills and orientation from literary translation. Also, interpretation skills are relatively undeveloped and also need specialised training, with reference to the relevant media (e.g. radio or TV) and context.

The activities of the NTM in this area would include:

- Running short-term training programmes.
- Creating course packages for translators that could become part of language teaching programmes across the country.
- Encouraging, supporting and assisting in the development of specialised courses in translation technology and related areas in universities and other institutions.
- Fellowship programmes that would also allow exchange of scholars between institutions. Here, a special emphasis could be laid on translation between Indian languages, rather than only to/from English.
- Encouraging research projects, including student research, specifically for making available good translations of identified texts as examples and generating resources that could also serve pedagogic aims.

2. Information dissemination.

Since translation is currently not a very prominent or highly rewarded activity, there is also inadequate knowledge about the translation capabilities that exist in the country, even among potential users. For example, there are many good translators in particular regional languages, who are unknown to publishers or those who would otherwise use their services. The Centre for Indian Languages, Mysore, trains around 400 teachers fluent in one Indian language in another Indian language every year. This is increasingly recognised as a necessary but scarce skill, but these trained people (around 8000 currently) are not widely known to potential users. In many languages, translations have already been created and printed by small publishers in a range of areas, but this output is not known to a wider group.

Therefore important activities of the NTM in this area would be:

- Creating a data repository of translators in different areas and with different skills and qualifications. This repository would be available online and also through contacting the NTM with specific requirements.
- Creating a data repository and annotated catalogue of existing translations of different works, classified by area, with new lists to be sent regularly to educational institutions, library networks, etc.

3. Promotion and dissemination of good quality translation material.

It is important to note that translation should not be a one-way street from English to Indian languages; rather, there is a wealth of material available in Indian languages which also requires greater dissemination both in English and in other Indian languages. In particular, the tradition of viewing translation as a parallel avenue of creativity should be encouraged. There is need for a horizontal paradigm which does not create a vertical distinction between donor and receiving languages, and promotes the multilinguality and cultural diversity of India. There is already a proliferation of some translation in certain areas (such as the works of Dr. Ambedkar which are being translated into many different languages) which reflects a wider social churning as well as the requirements and aspirations of newly literate groups.

In science and technical translation, unlike for literary translation, there is need for greater standardisation of terms and concepts so as to ensure both better comprehension and ease of moving across languages. However, not all terms should necessarily be translated, as there is growing acceptance of some scientific terms to be used in all languages. Further, translation today is an under-rewarded activity both in terms of social recognition and monetary remuneration, and this needs to be changed. It is also important to note that translation is an individual activity but also a social enterprise, in which success which may require the involvement of a range of different people at different stages and team work.

The issue of quality of translation is extremely important although difficult to ensure and maintain. The NTM could promote quality control by encouraging more teamwork in the translation process, organising or facilitating small workshops, creating a process of vetting during the process of translation, and drawing up a large list of evaluators who would be involved also in the post-revision checking of the translated work.

In this context the following specific activities of the NTM could be considered:

- Active promotion of good quality translations through book launches, festivals, fellowships and prizes.
- Encouraging collaborative translation work, as well as long-term multi-translator projects, and organising workshops for translators to interact and exchange views and experiences.

- Buy-back arrangements with publishers or other forms of subsidy to encourage publication. It is proposed that all pedagogic material produced under the sponsorship of the NTM should be available for free download from the NTM website. The print version would be available for sale by the publishers, free download would help immensely with publicity and provide wider access. The NTM could consider a scheme of paying publishers a small fee per download.
- Linking with library networks to ensure an initial market for good quality translation.
- Providing an interface between producers of translated material and publishers or purchasers, including both public and private organisations.
- Subsidising the initial translation of some current affairs journals and other useful and interesting material (such as the New Scientist, Economic and Political Weekly, and so on) for widespread dissemination into regional languages.
- Suggesting incorporation of translated material into syllabi of schools, colleges and universities, and in particular in literature studies at all levels bring in translated works from other Indian languages.
- Suggesting language resource centres in all schools and colleges and special book corners (dealing with translated materials) in schools.
- Promoting and disseminating less visible ongoing activities which emphasise bilingual skills (such as the compulsory translation section in the Karnataka police officers examination).
- Considering means to ensure greater access of translated material to smaller towns and villages, using other public and civil society organisations (such as the National Literacy Mission and the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti).

4. Promotion of machine translation.

New technologies provide exciting new opportunities for rapid and large volume translation at relatively low cost, although there are issues of both technology development and human resources in this context. A number of different organisations are involved in the creation and dissemination of machine translation. The NTM should not replicate these efforts by C-DAC, TDIL, the IITs, etc., which are already being extensively funded by government. However, it could facilitate technological progress in machine translation by assisting in the training and development of human technical resources for some activities and assisting in others through collaboration and providing synergy:

- Ensuring the creation of the necessary infrastructure, especially digital tools like Thesauri, Bilingual Dictionaries, software for Translation Memory, etc., which have immediate application for more efficient and effective translation.
- Lexical resources like e-dictionaries, wordnets, language analysis and synthesis tools, concordancers, frequency analysers etc. are the essential components of a machine translation system. These cannot be created and maintained by a single institute, but need multi-institute collaboration over a long time. NTM could provide a platform for team work, through continued interaction through meetings and online discussions.

- Source texts and translations should be made available in clean digital form as far as possible, with NTM working out the necessary copyright issues. NTM should ensure that this wealth of digital material is maintained in a standard form with standardised XML tags and DTDs.
- The international trend these days is to develop good quality parallel corpora with annotations and alignments. Such annotated corpora are treated with machine learning techniques to obtain machine translation systems. The sheer volume of this data and the magnitude of the effort requires substantial initial investments which are not ideally made by individual organisations; however, the NTM could facilitate such efforts and provide some support.
- Promote an interlingua based approach along the lines of the "Universal Networking Language" (UNL) initiated by the United Nations in 1996 involving 15 countries. (IIT Bombay has already developed various tools, techniques and resources for English and Indian language MT, which could be generalised.)

Structure of the National Translation Mission

In order to fulfil its objectives effectively and independently, it is important for the NTM to be located outside any existing government body or organisation, although of course it would have strong and continuous interaction with all related institutions. Autonomous existence and location are likely to be essential for its effective functioning.

The NTM would be a relatively small body in terms of its own infrastructure and be flexible in organisation, but would have a budget sufficient to enable it to carry out targeted funding in identified areas. It would have a Director-General, assisted by about 10 full-time academic staff and an equal number of support staff (including accounts/audit, library & info, web-designing and print-specialists, editing assistants, event organisation assistants, technicians/documentation people etc). The NTM will rely on extensive use of outside experts, that is individual consultants as well as experts on a number Advisory Committees in particular areas. Further, the NTM would have an Governing Council to guide its activities. This decision making body could consist of 10 members representing translators, academia, publishers, etc. with some sort of a rotating membership (for example, two to three year terms with two members being replaced every year).

The focus of the NTM would be on information, application, training and creativity in the area of translation. It will not function in a centralised way but will require involvement at many different levels, including state and local levels, and co-ordination with many different agencies. The NTM is expected to be engaged in activities that would involve participation of several thousand persons in different projects and over a few hundred reputed organisations. Therefore, it is important for the NTM to be located in a central place which has a large number of publishing houses, technical institutions, media agencies (including newspapers and television agencies) and language/translation specialists.

The proposed Working Group to plan out the details could go into these details and narrow down their choice of space and organisational tie-ups. The management of the mission should be professional and of the highest order. It is for this reason that the rates of payment to translators, consultants and specialists should be thought about carefully, and must be sufficient to make it attractive to the best minds with knowledge of several languages as well as mastery of translation techniques. The staff could be contractually appointed, and their continuance could be based on their work assessment and the needs of the NTM, with a salary structure that may have to be decided outside the conventional rates of payment, according to specific conditions from time to time. (Obviously, it is necessary to work out mechanisms to enable this without giving rise to accusations of irregularities.)

It is also proposed that the governing council members would rotate every three years or so, in order to avoid any one developing vested interest in managing the affairs of the NTM. The NTM should be headed by an appropriately qualified person at the Director-General's rank, with financial powers that make all these possible. Once again, the DG should also have a term of 3 years with a maximum of an additional term, and no more, so as to keep the activities free of being used or misused by any individual or group. The other regular staff could be hired on three-year terms which could be renewable (but not automatically so.) These and other details could be worked out by the proposed Working Group.

Coverage of the NTM

One division of NTM will be engaged in the promotion of publication of translated works in Indian languages as well as in those works in Indian languages that must be brought out in foreign languages. It goes without saying that there will also be focus on translating across Indian languages. It is expected that publishers, editors and individual translators of excellence will be involved on a large scale in this kind of activity. For logistic reasons, it may be better for the NTM to begin with the mandate of covering the 22 major languages in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, but the importance of maintaining and disseminating the output of other regional languages should not be forgotten.

In fact, actual translation (literary, pedagogical, social science, business, scientific, technical, machine or machine-aided) as well as generation of translation tools (MT systems, Thesauri, Dictionaries, etc.) should include all of the following combinations:

- (a) between English and Indian languages (both directions)
- (b) between one Indian language and another, and especially linking Hindi with other Indian languages for official purposes
- (c) between Indian languages and other major world languages, including European languages as well as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic.

The plan could be to cover the first two as immediate tasks on a priority basis and prepare the ground for the third to be undertaken eventually.

Co-ordination with other organisations

The NTM would co-ordinate and co-operate with a variety of organisations, to prevent duplication, create synergies and allow for integrated yet flexible development of translation activity.

There are broadly six types of organisations that are already engaged in translation activities of different types:

- (i) National Agencies and organisations, such as Sahitya Akademi, National Book Trust, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Central Translation Bureau, INSDOC, etc.,
- (ii) Language-specific agencies and organisations, both at the state and central level, such as Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Central Hindi Directorate, National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL), National Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language (NCPSL), Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, individual state-level language academies such as Punjabi Academi, Hindi Academy, Telugu Academy etc and language-specific universities such as Telugu University, Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, Tamil University, Kannada University, Maulana Azad National Urdu University and Dravidian University, etc.
- (iii) Foreign Languages Translation outfits, such as university departments of foreign languages (a list is available in UGC and AIU web-sites) as well as universities like CIEFL, Hyderabad – completely devoted to this area, and organisations under different ministries.
- (iv) University Departments teaching and training translation studies and comparative literary studies, such as IGNOU, Jadavpur University, University of Hyderabad, Madurai Kamaraj University, etc (once again, a list is available on the UGC website).
- (v) Publication houses managed by trusts as well as private companies of Indian as well as foreign origin, including Katha, Tulika, OUP, Macmillan, Rupa & Co, Vani Prakashan, Ananda Publishers, etc.
- (vi) Media, corporate houses, booksellers, etc.

In addition, the NTM will have to interact with and incorporate the requirements of teachers, students, parents, mature learners and other citizens. The point is to engage in strategic interventions building on and developing synergies with existing public institutions and private agents.

For logistic reasons, it may be better for the NTM to begin with the mandate of covering the 22 major languages in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, but the importance of maintaining and disseminating the output of other regional languages should not be forgotten.

Estimated expenditure

It is envisaged that a National Translation Mission performing these activities could be set up during the XIth Plan, with a proposed budget of Rs. 250 crore for the

entire Plan period (around Rs. 80 crore for organisational costs, manpower and scholarships, and around Rs. 170 crore for all other activities, which would involve funding other collaborating institutions/parties). Depending upon the experience during the 11th Plan period, the extent of this support could be enhanced subsequently. In addition, the NTM will require some one-time support for creating/developing the necessary infrastructure.

Working Group on NTM

Some possible names

1. Prof. Bipan Chandra, Chairman, NBT, or Mrs. Nuzhat Hassan, Director, NBT
2. Dr. Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee (Editor, Indian literature, and Member, Sahitya Akademi)
3. Prof. Alok Bhalla, (CIEFL, Hyderabad)
4. Prof. Indra Nath Choudhuri (formerly Professor of Hindi, University of Delhi, Director Nehru Centre and Secretary, Sahitya Akademi)
5. Ms. Geeta Dharmarajan, Katha Publishers, New Delhi
6. Prof. U. R. Ananthamurthy (former President, Sahitya Akademi and VC-Mahatma Gandhi University)
7. Prof. Nabaneeta Dev Sen (formerly Professor, Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University)
8. Ms. Mrinal Pande, Editor, Hindustan
9. Prof. Harish Trivedi, Department of English, Delhi University
10. Prof. Pushpak Bhattacharya (IIT-Mumbai)
11. Prof. Udaya Narayana Singh (Director, CIIL, Mysore) - **Convenor**
12. Dr. Neeti Badwe, Pune University
13. Prof. Vanamala Vishwanath, Bangalore University
14. Prof. Shobhit Mahajan, University of Delhi
15. Dr. Abhay Kumar Dube or Ravi Kant, CSDS, Delhi
16. Dr. Hemant Darbari, CDAC, Pune

Correspondence with Planning Commission

Planning Commission response to National Translation Mission proposal

No.P-11060/4/2005-Edn.
Planning Commission
(Education Division)

Yojanan Bhavan, Sansad Marg,
New Delhi-110001
Dated : 19.04.2006

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Subject : Proposal for setting up a National Translation Mission under the aegis of the National Knowledge Commission

The undersigned is directed to refer to your letter dated 6th March, 2006 copies of which were addressed to Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission and Member(Education) Planning Commission. The Planning Commission has studied the proposal in consultation with the Ministry of HRD, and the observations are as follows ::

- (i) A number of stakeholders should be involved in the Mission, such as universities and colleges, technical institutes (IIT and IIM etc), industry, mass-media, the publishing industry, foreign language schools, etc.
- (ii) Since a largely 'coordinating body' has been proposed, it could be located in one of the existing organizations.
- (iii) Management of this Mission would also need a lot of freedom and flexibility of operation. A suitable mechanism should be in place to ensure this.
- (iv) The translation should not only be from English to Indian languages but also between Indian languages.
- (v) Before a new body is constituted, it would be desirable to list out the organisations which are already dealing with translation issues so that their work can be coordinated by this Mission.

Kirti Saxena

(Kirti Saxena)
Director (Education)

Prof. Jayati Ghosh,
Member, National Knowledge Commission,
Centre for Policy Research,
Dharma Marg, Chanakyapuri,
New Delhi-110021

NKC Response to Planning Commission letter

1 May 2006

Dear Professor Mungekar,

We are in receipt of a letter from Ms. Kirti Saxena, Director (Education) responding to the proposal for a National Translation Mission (NTM) we had sent you earlier. We would like to thank you and Ms. Saxena for this response and for the very useful comments on the proposal and the possible structure of the NTM. We are in agreement with these comments, and shall incorporate them in our final proposal. A more detailed answer to some of the points raised in the letter is provided below.

1. Involvement of stakeholders:

We agree that a large number of stake-holders will be involved in the activities of the proposed NTM. Under the aegis of the NTM, different working groups are expected to be set up to direct, drive and monitor the projects in the relevant areas. To take one example, NTM would branch into the area of Machine Translation & Natural Languages Processing [NLP], in which IITs, IITs, IISc, C-DAC, ISI, etc are already involved, besides the Computer Science and AI departments of selected universities. Similarly, there would be groups that would look into readying the interpreters and translators in foreign languages as well as undertaking large-scale translation projects to add to knowledge and content in Indian languages. It is expected that the CIEFL, School of Foreign Languages, JNU, many other foreign language departments at Delhi University, Kolkata University, Viswabharati, or M. S. University of Baroda, etc will be involved in this area, besides the Schools of Foreign Languages under the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of External Affairs. Some other non-governmental organisations in the country handling foreign languages instructions, such as Auroville, Pondicherry or the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture at Kolkata, or even various institutions run by foreign embassies would also be involved. Since specialised people are required for activities such as translations and sub-titling as well as dubbing of films and television programmes, or to encourage more multilingual production of printed as well as web-based periodicals and newspapers, they would include freelance experts and also be drawn from these relevant fields, from media outfits, advertising agencies, NID, IIMC and FTIIs.

2. Organisational structure:

The NTM is expected to be engaged in activities that would involve participation of several thousand persons in different projects and over a few hundred reputed organisations but the coordinating personnel are going to be about 30 academic and 20-25 supporting staff. It is, therefore, certainly possible to start the activities as a branch of an already established organisation under the government. It could also be established on one of the central universities. If the need arises in future, it could then be separated as an organisation. However, as you have noted, wherever it is located, the NTM will require a

fair amount of autonomy and flexibility to operate (of course, with appropriate checks and accountability as per government rules). But ideally, the organisation coordinating it must have a national standing and international outreach. Further, it is important for the NTM to be located in a central place which has a large number of publishing houses, technical institutions, media agencies (including newspapers and television agencies) and language/translation specialists.

The proposed committee to plan out the details could go into these details and narrow down their choice of space and organisational tie-ups. The management of the mission should be professional and of the highest order. It is for this reason that the rates of payment to translators, consultants and specialists should be thought about carefully, and must be sufficient to make it attractive to the best minds with knowledge of several languages as well as mastery of translation techniques. The staff could be contractually appointed, and their continuance could be based on their work assessment and the needs of the NTM, with a salary structure that may have to be decided outside the conventional rates of payment, according to specific conditions from time to time. (Obviously, it is necessary to work out mechanisms to enable this without giving rise to accusations of irregularities.)

It is also proposed that the governing council members would rotate every three years or so, in order to avoid any one developing vested interest in managing the affairs of the NTM. It has already been proposed that the NTM should be headed by an appropriately qualified person at the Director-General's rank, with financial powers that make all these possible. Once again, the DG should also have a term of 5 years with a maximum of an additional term, and no more, so as to keep the activities free of being used or misused by any individual or group. These and other details could be worked out by the EFC.

3. Translated material:

One division of NTM will be engaged in the promotion of publication of translated works in Indian languages as well as in those works in Indian languages that must be brought out in foreign languages. It goes without saying that there will also be focus on translating across Indian languages. It is expected that publishers, editors and individual translators of excellence will be involved on a large scale in this kind of activity.

In fact, actual translation (literary, business, scientific, technical, machine or machine-aided) as well as generation of translation tools (MT systems, Thesauri, Dictionaries, etc.) should include all of the following combinations:

- (d) between English and Indian languages (both directions)
- (e) between one Indian language and another, and especially linking Hindi with other Indian languages for official purposes
- (f) between Indian languages and other major world languages, including European languages as well as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic.

The plan could be to cover the first two as immediate tasks on a priority basis and prepare the ground for the third to be undertaken eventually.

4. Existing organisations:

There are broadly five types of organisations that are already engaged in translation activities of different types:

- (vii) National Agencies and organisations, such as Sahitya Akademi, National Book Trust, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Central Translation Bureau, INSDOC, etc.,
- (viii) Language-specific agencies and organisations, both at the state and central level, such as Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Central Hindi Directorate, National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL), National Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language (NCPSL), Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, individual state-level language academies such as Punjabi Academi, Hindi Academy, Telugu Academy etc and language-specific universities such as Telugu University, Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, Tamil University, Kannada University, Maulana Azad National Urdu University and Dravidian University, etc.
- (ix) Foreign Languages Translation outfits, such as university departments of foreign languages (a list is available in UGC and AIU web-sites) as well as universities like CIEFL, Hyderabad – completely devoted to this area, and organisations under different ministries.
- (x) University Departments teaching and training translation studies and comparative literary studies, such as IGNOU, Jadavpur University, University of Hyderabad, Madurai Kamaraj University, etc (once again, a list is available on the UGC website).
- (xi) Publication houses managed by trusts as well as private companies of Indian as well as foreign origin, including Katha, Tulika, OUP, Macmillan, Rupa & Co, Vani Prakashan, Ananda Publishers, etc.

Obviously, all of these would have to be consulted with and involved at different levels, but none of them would be able to fulfil the umbrella functions envisaged for the NTM.

We plan to incorporate these ideas into the final proposal to be submitted to the PMO.

Thanking you,

With warm regards,

Jayati Ghosh