Note for TISS for inclusion in the 12th Plan document

Proposal for a Centre for Indian Languages in Higher Education

Proposal:

Six million students (40% of all enrolled students) from non-metropolitan India enter the system every year and fail to achieve success because they are unable to cope with education in English. Public elementary education in India has been largely moving towards vernacular medium instruction. But globalization has only reinforced the position of English as the single most important language for teaching and research in the higher education sector. Caught in this tug-of-war, the higher education student from a non-metropolitan context is finding it impossible to cope. Only about 11% of the relevant age group enters higher education, of which only 17% of them go on to obtain a post-graduate degree. One of the significant contributory factors to this situation is the enormous linguistic divide within Indian higher education, a divide that has severe consequences for occupational, economic and social mobility, and the quality of life, of non-metropolitan students.

It is a fact of Indian higher education that while the mandated medium of instruction is English the default language of the classroom is the local language of the students. Improving English skills has no effect when attention is not paid to the relevance of the curriculum to contemporary needs. Similarly, translating large amounts of material into Indian languages also has little effect because the relevance and effectiveness of the materials produced for higher education are not factored in.

There is a widening gap between the growing knowledge resources in the world and the conceptual universe of the students. The gap can be bridged not through marginalizing local languages in favour of English but by strengthening Indian language resources. Such strengthening would have a dual purpose: it would help the student enter new domains of knowledge through a familiar medium, and it would eventually lead to the domains themselves becoming more context-sensitive.

Earlier interventions in relation to promoting Indian languages have often focused solely on translation into those languages to the detriment of generation of new materials. Also, such interventions have been located in stand-alone institutions and have not entered HE spaces, thus failing to impact teaching-learning in colleges and universities. The proposed Centre, housed in a university space such as TISS, will have the advantage of being part of a vibrant academic community that has also had a long-standing investment in outreach and extension activities.

The overall long-term objective of the Centre’s interventions would be bilingual (and where possible, multi-lingual) proficiency for teacher and student, a proficiency that would bridge the different knowledge worlds that converge in Indian Higher Education (HE).

Access, equity and social diversity issues which are central to the exponential growth of HE in India can be addressed through a focus on Indian language materials and their deployment in the classroom.

It is proposed that the Centre for Indian Languages in Higher Education at TISS take up the following programmes in the 2012-2017 12th Plan period:

Curriculum Augmentation Programme: Dearth of quality teaching-learning materials in Indian languages is an important gap that needs addressing. The Centre for ILHE will set up a Curriculum Augmentation Programme that would work on
strengthening student comprehension of existing curricula through bridge materials. Initial listing of available resources in at least four Indian languages will be undertaken in Year 1, including identification, cataloguing and annotation of the resources. These will be used for enhancing curricular access in four language contexts where the model will be piloted.

Indian Language Materials Fellowship Programme: This programme will be established at pre- and post-doctoral levels for producing original works and translations in Indian languages, and to facilitate curricularising such materials. Original materials and bridge materials in different disciplines with a strong focus on social sciences and humanities would be produced through the Centre. Four fellowships every year for five years are envisaged. Writing and translation workshops (general as well as language-specific) – one every year in each category – are envisaged.

Teacher Training for Indian Language Use in HE: Teacher training workshops for bilingual pedagogy at UG and PG levels will be designed and piloted by the Centre. Two workshops every year for five years are envisaged.

Research Programme in Indian Languages and HE: An important feature of the Centre would be a robust inter-disciplinary research programme engaging with Indian languages, with a focus on education, translation, and localization. Initially, the Centre could offer an M.Phil. degree and then a Ph.D. Research training would include components of Indian language use and curation of archival materials. Research projects that take up issues relating to language, equity and access could also be developed and housed under the Centre.

Digital Archive and Resources: The Centre would set up, in collaboration with INFLIBNET, the infrastructure to develop and disseminate a digital archive in 4 languages. There will be a focus on developing new e-content and making it available for teaching-learning.

Geographical scope: Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh

Budget components:

--Augmentation of library resources to house special Indian language collections
--Fellowships
--Research funds
--Funds for digital archiving
--Honoraria for consultants and short-term visitors
--Fees for referees and reviewers
--Meetings, workshops, conferences (travel and hospitality)
--Staffing: One Professor, one Associate Professor, two Assistant Professors and two Research Assistants
--Publication funds
Centre’s activities in brief:

Production of new resource materials

Curricular integration of Indian language materials

Development of new curricula

Development of a dissemination strategy

Teacher training for bilingual pedagogy

Supervised field-testing of new curricular modules

Inter-disciplinary research programme in education, translation, localization with a focus on Indian language resources