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## EVER HEARD OF THE ORIENTAL TRANSLATOR'S OFFICE?

The "**Oriental Translator to the Government**" (**O. T.**) was a kind of super-linguist who was able to speak multiple languages and was given all kinds of special privileges because of it. The O. T. worked under the diplomatic arm of the **British Indian Government**. The person carrying out this position had to interpret and translate between several languages, including Hindustani, Gujarati, Marathi, Persian, and other tongues.

The O. T. oversaw language examinations, recruitment of linguists, reports from native press (known as "foreign media analysis" today), conducted translations of official correspondence, compiled glossaries, and of course, interpreted. As an esteemed linguistic and cultural adviser, the O. T. also had the rather strange duty of determining the acceptability of any Indian who desired to attend a government social event, somewhat like a social secretary.



A more recent photo of the Oriental Translator's Office from  
1948.

This month's source of inspiration is **Shankar Pandarang Pandit**, one of the first Indians to ever hold the position of O. T., which had traditionally been filled by an Englishman. At the age of 18, Shankar worked as a village bookkeeper earning two rupees per month. He had no money to pay for schooling, but he eavesdropped near outdoor classes in order to learn.

One day, a wealthy man noticed him and offered to finance his education. He had an incredible talent for languages. Just 10 years later, he had obtained a Master's degree from Bombay University, a highly-regarded scholar in English, Sanskrit, and Latin, and was proficient in **10 Indian and European languages**. No other O. T. could ever match his accomplishments. Shankar worked in this official capacity from 1879 to 1894.

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