

## [India's Languages Join The Computer Revolution](#)

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# India's Languages Join The Computer Revolution

Have a need to type Mayan Hieroglyphics on your computer? How about Persian Cuneiform, Mycenaean Ideographs or Crypro Minoean? Perhaps you'd like to write an Eskimo-in Eskimo-and thank him for getting those whales out of the ice. More practically speaking, what if you're the King of Thailand and you want all the children in Thailand to learn the ancient Thai script, a priceless part of your country's heritage?

The answer is simple, buy yourself a Macintosh computer (Thailand's King has two) and call Dr. Lloyd B. Anderson at Ecological Linguistics in Washington, DC. His catalog lists computer fonts for 85 modern and ancient languages, including all 15 of India's official languages: Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu. He also has a font which includes the diacritical marks needed to put Indian languages into Roman script.

For those not familiar with typesetting or computers, a word of explanation: In the "old" days, type was necessarily quite physical, every language requiring its own specialized typewriters and typesetting supplies. Computers changed all that by storing the letters electronically, suddenly opening the possibility for a single machine to type in hundreds of different scripts. That's an advancement with ramifications for every literate society in the world.

It was also the golden ring that Dr. Anderson saw and decided to reach for. He told HINDUISM TODAY that, as a linguist, he had searched for a computer on which he could relatively easily create fonts for languages which don't presently have them, such as ancient Mayan (which he helped first decipher). "[I spent] years looking at computers and thinking each time, 'Oh, this one is going to do it,' Then I discovered the Macintosh. I tried to collect fonts [that others had created] but people did not understand them well enough." So he decided to start his own company by collecting language fonts from people already working in the field and

improving them for commercial distribution.

His fonts all require a Macintosh computer and a printer. His best fonts are "Postscript" fonts, a special computer language which allows very high resolution printers to create the type. Dr. Anderson said the IBM computers, even with their new Presentation Manager graphics interface, are unable to match the Macintosh.

What does it all mean for India? Right now, most typesetting in India is done with handset or automated lead type. Optical phototypesetting is the next advancement, but computer typesetting is more versatile and much cheaper. Indian firms don't need to invest in optical systems but can leap directly to computer typesetting.

For a catalog, write Ecological Linguistics, PO Box 15156, Washington, DC, 20003, USA.

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