

Court: Checks Can Be Written In Sanskrit

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NEW DELHI, INDIA, February 20, 2005: Taking serious note of a bank's lack of respect to Sanskrit language, Delhi state consumer forum has ordered a compensation of around US\$ 275 to a man whose checks were not honored as he had filled them up in the revered ancient language, says this article on a 1991 case which just got a final court judgment. "To deprive the consumer of his constitutional right of mentioning the amount of the check in Sanskrit amounts to grossest deficiency in service and violation of Official Languages Act," Delhi State Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission President J.D. Kapoor and Member Rumnita Mittal said.

S.N. Panigrahi, who had an account with the Andhra Bank, Green Park branch had been signing and writing checks in the Sanskrit language since 1987 when suddenly in 1991 a bank official objected to UTI Master Plus checks of approximately Rs. 5,000 (US\$114) each in Sanskrit and declined to honor them. The court found that the amount in figures has been referred as Rs 5,000 in all the five checks whereas in the words, it has been mentioned as "Panch Sahastra Matra." On insistence of the official, he had clarified its meaning in Hindi also. Terming the conduct of Andhra Bank as "highly deplorable and capricious," the commission observed "if there was difficulty for the official to decipher the meaning of 'Panch Sahastra Matra' he could have got it clarified from a person having adequate knowledge of the language." The commission said from the very fact that the amount was mentioned in figure, his refusal to honor the checks shows the official was "illiterate" or "was adamant in not honoring the check. Such an attitude smacks of arbitrariness."

Rejecting the bank's contention that it was well within its right to reject the checks as the language used in official communication should be either English or Hindi as per the Official Languages Rules, it said, "This rule is not applicable as it relates to communication between state and central Government." Panigrahi's earlier complaint in the district forum was dismissed on the premise that "though importance of the Sanskrit language was emphasized and concern was shown, even after 50 years of our independence, nothing had been done to propagate the use of this language." Setting aside the order, the State commission allowed his appeal and awarded him a compensation of around US\$275 for mental agony, harassment, financial loss and litigation costs.