Oriya Writing

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The Oriya [oɽia] script is derived from the Brahmi script of the Ashokan inscriptions; in Orissa state, specimens are found in the Dhauli and Jaugar inscriptions of the Emperor Ashoka (3rd century B.C.E.) and the Khandagiri inscriptions of King Kharabela (1st century C.E.). However, unlike these inscriptions, the language of which was Prakrit, the earliest inscription in Oriya is the Urjam inscription of 1051 C.E. This inscription is in Kalinga script, the variety of Brahmi from which modern Oriya script has evolved. It is syllabically based on the unit called the *akṣara* in Sanskrit, [ɔkhyɔrɔ] in Oriya. The script is written from left to right.

Since a large number of tribal languages, of both the Dravidian and Munda families, are spoken within the geopolitical limits of Orissa state, many of these languages have adopted the Oriya script in writing their languages. Sanskrit too is written in Oriya script in Orissa.

The specific features of the Oriya script are as follows.

The vowel *a*, phonetically [ɔ], is inherent in each consonant symbol, whether simple or conjunct, unless the letter is modified by the bottom stroke called *haḷanta*. Thus �କ *ka* and ଗ *ga*, when marked wth this stroke as କ୍, ଗ୍, are read as *k* and *g* respectively.

Vowels other than *a*, when following a consonant, are written as obligatory diacritics. The diacritics for *ā* and *ī* are on the right side, as in କା *kā* and କୀ *kī*. The diacritic for *i* goes on top of the consonant letter, as in କି *ki*. The diacritics for *u*, *ū*, and *ṛ* go under the consonant, as in କୁ *ku*, କୂ *kū*, and କୃ *kṛ*. The diacritic for *e* precedes the consonant as in କେ *ke*. The diacritics for *o*, *ai*, and *au* are discontinuous, surrounding the consonant, as in କୈ *kai*, କୋ *ko*, and କୌ *kau*. Sometimes the vowel diacritics may be fused with consonants, e.g. କି *ki*, କୁ *ku*.

Similarly, secondary forms are used for consonants occurring in clusters; thus କ୍ *k* + ତ *ta* yields କ୍ତ *kta*, ସ୍ *s* + ଥ *tha* yields ସ୍ଥ *stha*. Homorganic nasal + stop clusters are generally written with distinct conjunct characters, such as ଙ୍କ *ṅka* and ଞ୍ଚ *ñca*, but the nasal may also be written with *anusvāra*, as in ଅଂକ for ଅଙ୍କ *aṅka*.

A fairly large number of other consonant clusters are also written with distinct conjunct characters which cannot be further analyzed; e.g., ନ୍ *n* + ଦ *da* = ନ୍ଦ *nda*, ଦ୍ *d* + ଧ *dha* = ଦ୍ଧ *ddha*. In borrowed words, however, clusters are written with *haḷanta* attached to the first member of the cluster, as in କ୍ଚ *kca*, ପ୍ଟ *pṭa*.

TABLE 35.1: *Vowels*

	Initial			Diacritic		
High neutral	ଅ	a [ɔ]	–	କ	ka [kɔ]
Low neutral	ଆ	ā [a]	◌ା	କା	kä [ka]
High unrounded	ଇ	i [i]	◌ି	କି	ki [ki]
High unrounded long	ଈ	ī [i]	◌ୀ	କୀ	kī [ki]
High rounded	ଉ	u [u]	◌ୁ	କୁ	ku [ku]
High rounded long	ଊ	ū [u]	◌ୂ	କୂ	kū [ku]
Syllabic vibrant	ଋ	r̥ [ru]	◌ୃ	କୃ	kr̥ [kru]
Mid unrounded	ଏ	e [e]	େ◌	କେ	ke [ke]
Mid rounded	ଓ	o [o]	ୋ◌	କୋ	ko [ko]
Diphthongs	ଐ	ai [ɔi]	ୈ◌	କୈ	kai [kɔi]
	ଔ	au [ɔu]	ୌ◌	କୌ	kau [kɔu]

The symbols

The traditional order of symbols in Oriya is based on articulatory phonetics, as originally developed for Sanskrit. First come the primary vowels, followed by five series of occlusives (including nasals) along the dimensions of voicing and aspiration. The rest of the consonants are non-occlusives. Nasalization of vowels is written with a diacritic *candrabindu* above the syllable, as in ଆ *ā* versus ଆଁ *ã* or କା *kā* vs. କାଁ *kā̃*.

TABLE 35.2: *Occlusives*

	VOICELESS PLOSIVES		VOICED PLOSIVES		NASALS
	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	
Velar	କ k [k]	ଖ kh [kʰ]	ଗ g [g]	ଘ gh [gʱ]	ଙ ṅ [ŋ]
Palatal	ଚ c [tʃ]	ଛ ch [tʃʰ]	ଜ j [dʒ]	ଝ jh [dʒʱ]	ଞ ñ [ɲ]
Retroflex	ଟ ṭ [t]	ଠ ṭh [tʰ]	ଡ ḍ [d]	ଢ ḍh [dʱ]	ଣ ṇ [ɳ]
Dental	ତ t [t]	ଥ th [tʰ]	ଦ d [d]	ଧ dh [dʱ]	ନ n [n]
Labial	ପ p [p]	ଫ ph [pʰ]	ବ b [b]	ଭ bh [bʱ]	ମ m [m]

TABLE 35.3: *Sonorants and Fricatives*

	Palatal	Retroflex	Dental	Labial	Other
Sonorants	ୟ j′ [dʒ] ୟ y [j]	ର r [r] ଳ ḷ [ɭ]	ଲ l [l]	ଵ v [w]	
Sibilants	ଶ ś [s]	ଷ ṣ [s]	ସ s [s]		ହ h [h]

The set of vowels (*svara*), with their phonetic values, is given in TABLE 35.1.

The inventory of consonants (*vyañjana*) is given in TABLES 35.2 and 35.3. The palatal stops are phonetically affricates. The velar and the palatal nasals occur only in homorganic clusters. The retroflex voiced stops *ḍ*, *ḍh* have flapped variants [ɽ, ɽʰ] which occur intervocalically; a subscript dot is often used to mark these: ଡ଼ *ṛ*, ଢ଼ *ṛh*.

Conjunct consonants

Consonant clusters (*j̓uktākṣara*) are written in Oriya in several ways. In many cases, the second member is reduced or simplified and attached to the bottom of the first member:

ଷ	ṣ	+	ପ	pa	=	ଷ୍ପ	ṣpa
ଣ	ṇ	+	ଠ	ṭha	=	ଣ୍ଠ	ṇṭha
ବ	b	+	ଦ	da	=	ବ୍ଦ	bda
ଦ	d	+	ଧ	dha	=	ଦ୍ଧ	ddha

In other cases, it is the first member which is reduced and attached to the second:

ଦ	d	+	ଭ	bha	=	ଦ୍ଭ	dbha
ଙ	ṅ	+	କ	ka	=	ଙ୍କ	ṅka

The consonant ତ *t* has two reduced forms, depending on whether it is first or second member. In first position ⌐:

ତ	t	+	ପ	pa	=	ତ୍ପ	tpa
ତ	t	+	କ	ka	=	ତ୍କ	tka

In second position –ʲ:

ପ	p	+	ତ	ta	=	ପ୍ତ	pta
କ	k	+	ତ	ta	=	କ୍ତ	kta

In other combinations, however, ତ *t* has its full form:

ତ	t	+	ନ	na	=	ତ୍ନ	tna

Similarly, ର *r* has two reduced forms, in first position –:

ର	r	+	ପ	pa	=	ର୍ପ	rpa
ର	r	+	ବ	ba	=	ର୍ବ	rba

But in second position ⌐ :

ପ	p	+	ର	ra	=	ପ୍ର	pra
ଫ	ph	+	ର	ra	=	ଫ୍ର	phra

The consonant ଯ *y* in second position is written as ୟ after the first consonant:

କ	k	+	ଯ	ya	=	କ୍ୟ	kya

Finally, some clusters have idiosyncratic fused shapes:

କ	k	+	ଷ	ṣa	=	କ୍ଷ	kṣa
ନ	n	+	ଦ	da	=	ନ୍ଦ	nda

Distinctive characteristics

The Oriya script in its distinctive features resembles related scripts of the eastern Indic variety. Visually, the basic symbols for vowels and consonants can be grouped into five types on the basis of their sharing similar features. These are:

a. A top "hoop" attached to the distinctive shape, as in କ *ka* and ଚ *ca*.

b. A top curve with a tail (Matson's "handle") attached to the distinctive shape, as in ଇ *i* and ର *ra*.

c. A top curve with a side bar ("hatrack") attached to the distinctive shape, as in ଗ *ga* and ଣ *ṇa*.

d. A bottom curve with a side bar ("hook") attached to the distinctive shape, as in ଅ *a* and ଥ *tha*.

e. A few miscellaneous letters like ଏ *e* and ଠ *ṭha*.

SAMPLE OF ORIYA

1. Oriya:	ପ୍ରାଣିଙ୍କ	ଆରତ	ଦୁଃଖ	ଅପ୍ରମିତ	ଦେଖୁ	ଦେଖୁ
2. Transliteration	prāṇiṅka	ārata	duḥkha	apramita	dekhu	dekhu
3. Transcription:	praṇiṅkɔ	arɔtɔ	dukhɔ	ɔprɔmitɔ	dekhu	dekhu
4. Gloss:	of.living.beings	misery	sorrow	unlimited	seeing	seeing

1.	କେବା	ସହୁ
2.	kebā	sahŭ
3.	keba	sɔhu
4.	who	could.tolerate

1. ମୋ	ଜୀବନ	ପଛେ	ନର୍କେ	ପଡ଼ିଥାଉ	ଜଗତ	ଉଦ୍ଧାର	ହେଉ
2. mo	jībana	pache	narke	paṛithāu	jagata	uddhāra	heu
3. mo	ʤibɔnɔ	pɔche	nɔrke	pɔṛithau	ʤɔgɔtɔ	uddhārɔ	heu
4. my	life	even.if	in.hell	let.it.remain	world	saved	let.it.be

'Who could tolerate seeing the unbounded misery and sorrow of living beings? Let my life remain in hell, but let the world be saved.'
— *From a poem by Bhima Bhoi, an illiterate tribal saint of the 19th century.*

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