

TRANSLITERATION OF MALAYALAM: Problems and Solutions M K Bhasi

Will the world Malayalee Council and other Malayalee associations in India and overseas give priority to the transliteration of Malayalam in their agenda so that a universally accepted method could be arrived at?

In a new awakening for the search of one's own roots and culture, language has become a key factor. For the Malayalee diaspora, a universally accepted method of transliteration of Malayalam using English alphabet will go a long way to make it easier for correct pronunciation. Various attempts have been made in the past but still there are problems.

The present romanised way of transliteration is far from satisfactory. This is because of the fact that a number of characters with slight differences in sound could not be expressed correctly by using the English alphabet. We don't have English characters to differentiate between ഞ and ഞ and between എ and ഉ . Using small and capital letters to solve this problem looks weird. The same problem we face with ത, ഫ, ഓ, ധ and ള, റ, ള, ഴ.

Therefore, a few modifications are necessary and a few rules to be remembered and followed consistently.

Transliteration—what's it?

Expressing the words of one language using the alphabets of another language is known as transliteration. A number of languages use English alphabet for this. A good and successful example is the Malay language which uses English instead of Arabic. Malay has made certain adjustments and rules to implement this successfully. We need different modifications to suit our language so that the different shades of Malayalam sound could be written correctly.

Some Rules to Follow

In our attempt to transliterate Malayalam, the following rules have to be followed consistently to avoid confusion:

1. One alphabet will represent only one sound.
2. Avoid diacritical marks (marks or pointers attached to letters to indicate differences of sound) as far as possible.
3. Computer key boards should be able to handle all the characters.
4. For combined letters, the rule must be consistent. For example, if we use j for ജ, nj for ഞ , then ജ്ഞ should be jnj.
5. y should never be used to indicate ഇ sound; y should only represent ധ. For ഇ sound, always use i.
6. For long vowels, use the same character twice. ഞ = a and ഞ = aa

Here We Go

Let us now see how we could go about our transliteration.

Vowels (short and long) - സ്വരങ്ങൾ

അ = a	ആ = aa	ഇ = i	ഈ = ii
ഉ = u	ഊ = uu	എ = e	ഈ = ee
ഓ = o	ഔ = oo	ഋ = r*	

Diphthongs (combined vowels)

ക	ഖ	ഗ	ഘ	ങ
k	kh	g	gh	ng
ച	ഛ	ജ	ഝ	ഞ
c	ch	j	jh	nj
ട	ഠ	ഡ	ഢ	ണ
t'	t'h	d'	d'h	n'
ത	ഥ	ദ	ധ	ന (ന* = ചന്മയിലെ ന)
t	th	d	dh	n
പ	ഫ	ബ	ഭ	മ
p	ph	b	bh	m
യ	ര	ല	വ	
y	r	l	v	
ശ	ഷ	സ	ഹ	
s'	sh	s	h	
ള	ഴ	റ	റ്റ	
l'	zh	r'	t	

Some Advantages

- 1 It is possible to use the computer keyboard for all the characters.
- 2 Only 15 vowels and 43 consonants are needed.
- 3 Only 11 of these characters need diacritical marks —7 need apostrophe, 2 need a * on top and 1 needs underline.
- 4 There will be accuracy in pronunciation.

Conclusion

I am indebted to Dr J V Vilanilam, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Kerala for his article in Malayalam on the same topic. (Bhasha Poshini Oct-Nov 1992 issue).

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A complete chart of all the required alphabets and some examples are given separately for easy reference and practice. (See appendix 1 and appendix 2).

(Please send your feed back / comments to mkbhasi@kaumudisingapore.com)

TRANSLITERATION OF MALAYALAM

Appendix 1

അ	ആ	ഇ	ഈ	ഉ	ഊ
a	aa	i	ii	u	uu
എ	ഈ	ഒ	ഔ		
e	ee	o	oo		
ഋ	ഌ	ഋ	അം	അഃ	
r*	ai	ow	am	a:	
ക	ഖ	ഗ	ഘ	ങ	
k	kh	g	gh	ng	
ച	ഛ	ജ	ഝ	ഞ	
c	ch	j	jh	nj	
ട	ഠ	ഡ	ഢ	ണ/ൺ	
t'	t'h	d'	d'h	n'	
ത	ഥ	ദ	ധ	ന/ൻ	ന
t	th	d	dh	n	n*
					വനയിലെ ന
പ	ഫ	ബ	ഭ	മ	
p	ph	b	bh	m	
ര	ര	ല / ൽ	വ	ശ	ഷ
y	r	l	v	s'	sh
സ	ഹ	ള / ൾ	ഴ	റ/ർ	റ്റ
s	h	l'	zh	r'	t

S'akuntal'a	ശകുന്തള
Aaluva	ആലുവ
Aluva	അലുവ
Bhagiirathan	ഭഗീരഥൻ
Buddhan	ബുദ്ധൻ
Budhan	ബുധൻ
Daya	ദയ
Dhyaanam	ധ്യാനം
Pat'accavan	പടച്ചവൻ
Cilappool'	ചിലപ്പോൾ
Cakr'avar'tti	ചക്രവർത്തി
Vil'l'aal'iviiran	വില്ലാളിവിരൻ
Jhilli jhankaaram	ജില്ലി ജങ്കാരം
Pattabhisheekam	പട്ടാഭിഷേകം
Raaman	രാമൻ
Mamgalaapuram	മംഗലാപുരം
Paadukam	പാദുകം
Ila	ഇല
Il'ankoovan	ഇളക്കോവൻ
Dhiiram	ധീരം
Santaanagoopaalam	സന്താനഗോപാലം
S'ar'kkara	ശർക്കര
S'ar'kkara	ശർക്കര
R*shi	ഋഷി
Himaalayam	ഹിമാലയം
S'aanti	ശാന്തി
Arttham	അർത്ഥം
Arddhanaariis'varan	അർദ്ധനാരീശ്വരൻ
Maddhyapr'ades'am	മദ്ധ്യപ്രദേശം
Puttappar'tti	പുട്ടപ്പർത്തി
Pr'oud'hi	പ്രൗഢി
Paat'habheedam	പാഠഭേദം ■

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