

How comfortable would it be if we could use one single script to learn any Indian language! Is it at all possible? Why haven't there been attempts to bring all the languages under one single alphabetic umbrella? Is it impossible to master the characters of an alphabet? There is a way out of this needless drudgery. So far we have been looking at the problem from only one angle, the visual angle which frightens us with the complicated designs of the letter symbols. We feel it will take an eternity to master these designs. Is there any other angle? There is! We have not thought of the phonetic angle. Forget all visual symbols. Let us concentrate on the sound part of it. Take a word, any word, and split it into its component sounds. For example take, the words **"ottālikā"** in Odissi and **'māligai'** in Tamil. (Both have the same meaning - mansion.) If we split the two words into their respective component sound symbols we arrive at the following two combinations; in Odissi it is **"ot+tā+li+kā"**. In Tamil it is **"mā+li+gai"**. Here each sound syllable is available in every Indian language. No syllable is an exception. The sound syllables are like building blocks. If we find a font which can offer the building blocks we will have arrived at a common script.

Now each Indian language has its own characters to make up the words! We need a font which can represent any Indian language. The font should not affect either the purity or the identity of a language or the phonetic accuracy of any word that is represented. This is an exercise mainly in "script reform". No Indian language lends itself to change to suit the other Indian languages. We have to resort to a font which is familiar to the eye and ear of the literate, and easy to learn. The only font that is readily available is the Roman font. It is not alien to us (being already in use); all literate people are familiar with it, at least are not new to it. Thousands of schools in India teach the Roman font. How would the Indian languages accommodate the new font? Is there a common ground? For this we have to go into the phonetics of the letters of the Indian languages. We shall take each letter of each alphabet and find out how the Roman font can be installed as a substitute. We found that there are nearly a thousand characters among the different languages; do we have so many characters in the Roman font? We do not need so many. Let us find out why. Take the sound syllable **'ka'**. The phonetic value is the same in all Indian languages, whether Tamil or Gurmukhi. It is true of almost all sound symbols. Letter symbols in each language could have a common Roman font. This could save about thirty symbols per language. The conjunct consonants can be written phonetically as is presently done in the Tamil font. This could save another forty symbols per language. The vowels could help us with a saving of about twelve symbols. If we add up all these savings it could be considerable, leaving us with much less than a hundred sound syllables to accommodate. We will be arriving at the exact requirement after we draw tables for each section of the alphabet.