CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE SITUATION IN INDIA
AND THE PROBLEM OF SCRIPT

2.1 Introduction

In the present age, when the world has become so small, the problem of script for any people cannot be considered in isolation. Along with the linguistic factors we need to consider several other issues too. The language situation in the state and language situation in India will be the broadest frame we will have to work within, in finding a suitable script for Kurux language.

The problem of script is not an isolated case for the Kurux people. It is a problem still for all our tribal languages and major dialects which are mostly non-literate. That is not all. The script has become a problem in fact for even major Indian languages as they have proved to be unviable for technical applications.

With more than 200 graphic structures, all the Indian language scripts pose problems in key board management. Their not so regular symbols defeat several attempts at evolving the characters on the computer screen.

Then what is the option before us? What should
be our guiding factor in deciding upon scripts for so many non-literate languages when we are taking decisive steps towards universal education? How can we facilitate mass production of teaching materials in these languages? Several such questions arise and unless we study the national and the local issues thoroughly, we cannot arrive at a solution to the writing problems of Kurux people.

2.2 Unity and Diversity

Even a few millenia back, the Indian subcontinent presented a very complex language situation due to the moving in of people through the Himalayan Passes into the fertile Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra valleys and across the sea into the Southern Peninsula. These were the Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan groups, apart from the Syrians, Jews, Greeks, Turks and others who also moved in at different times in history. Among these, the Dravidian and the Aryan peoples have mixed and mingled to such a great degree that the mixing was also on higher intellectual and literary levels. These were the peoples who had ancient writing tradition. The Indus valley civilization had used a phonetic script system and scholars have now established its link with the Brahmi Script which is considered the source of all Indian scripts. With a script to record knowledge, education percolated to the farthest corners of India though it was very much kept the sole prerogative of the higher castes and classes.
We hear of ancient literary conferences to spread knowledge and education. What might count as the earliest literary Congress of the world was the Congress of Philosophers convened by King Janaka of Videha. (Chopra, 1988:42). There were also the three Sangam conferences of Tamilnadu. There are ancient Sanskrit and Tamil grammatical treatises, laying down very clear rules about how to render the spoken language into the written medium. But the common man had been excluded from all educational activities as the story of Ekalavya shows.

During the 600 years of Moghul rule, there was Perso-Arabic influence on a greater part of India. A common Hindu rule and then Moghul rule provided optimal conditions for diffusion of languages in a unique manner and produced an assortment of languages, yet with clearly perceptible connections even between geographically far-flung ones.

The British and the missionary period saw two trends in the domain of languages. One was an attempt to introduce English, the other was a resistance to Perso-Arabic influence by reviving Sanskrit and the vernaculars of the land. In early nineteenth century, English decisively replaced Persian as the official language of the Government all over India. Since then, as Sanskrit or Persian in earlier times, English has become the medium of higher
education in India. The cumulative historical influence of three different languages - Sanskrit, Persian and English on vast geographical areas of India has resulted in the occurrence of same or similar loan words and grammatical categories in most of the Indian Languages, thus weaving a beautiful thread of unity among the divergent language families.

2.3 Language Problems in India

Language is a communication bridge between people, built through an arbitrary system of sound symbols - a definite sequence representing a definite semantic field. Though arbitrary, the indigenous systems, developed through the ages in individual groups are intimately related to the life of the people. Thus any child receives his non-formal initial education through his mother tongue or the language spoken by the people around the small world of the child. This language has tremendous significance in the life of an individual.

Several such mother tongues exist in India. According to 1971 census, there are at least 105 languages spoken by more than 10,000 people. The 1961 census has recorded 1652 mother tongues in India, coming under the four language families already mentioned.

Among these, only 12 major literary languages were recognised as official languages of the Union of India apart
from Sindhi and Urdu as non-state languages. English is the language of intellection and Sanskrit the classical language. The twelve major languages are Hindi, Oriya, Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Kashmiri, (Indio Aryan Languages) Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam (Dravidian Languages). None of the Munda and Tibeto Burman languages have either the numerical strength or a strong literary tradition so as to dictate recognition as a major language. (CIIL, 1973 : vi)

There are nearly 400 tribal languages which are non-literary, spoken by more than 60 million people. These people are found scattered among the dominant language groups. They are invariably economically and educationally backward when compared to others.

The Indian Constitution, through articles 343-351 deals with the language situation in India. Articles 29, 30 and 347 are devised to safeguard the interests of minority language groups. Article 343 makes Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of India. It stands on purely empirical grounds, being spoken by 33 percent of the total population.

From time to time people exert pressure for the inclusion of their language in the VIII schedule of the constitution. In view of such legitimate demands, our Government has amended some of the Constitutional provisions. Thus the official languages Act of 1967 came
The Twenty first Amendment - 1967 added Sindhi to the list of official languages. Konkani was recognised as one of the official languages of Goa under the official Language Act passed in 1987.

At all stages, diversity of languages has been considered the starting point of Language Planning in India. This is in line with the linguistic thinking of the eighteenth and nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the leading advocates being William Adam, Grierson and others.

In spite of our very flexible official language policy, tensions between language groups are always on the rise. The language tensions became manifest nearly 15 years after independence in Tamilnadu and Bengal. This was sparked off by the decision of the government to implement Article 343 of the Constitution - bringing into effect the use of Hindi as the Lingua-franca or the Official National Language of India. The newly growing Hindi language proved a misfit for official purposes and a poor contender to replace the English monolith. Moreover, in a democratic set up the imposition of one language on other language groups or propagating one language in preference to others invited resistance. Realising the folly and accepting the fact that Indian Languages are mutually unintelligible, the government immediately withdrew its stand and the subsequent prime ministers have time and again stressed that Hindi will not be imposed on non-Hindi speaking people. The would-be link
language will be propagated not through coercion, but through persuasion.

We cannot always shift the blame for language tension on vested interests and political motivation, blinding ourselves to the bare facts of the real world people are living in. The facts of Tamilnadu remain that the state had never come under Moghul rule and the propagation of Persian or Arabic was historically non-existent except through Muslim settlers who used the local language as the literary medium to propagate their religion. There is a wide gap between the Tamil people and the Hindi-Urdu language amalgam. Hence, the people equated language imposition with historical sequence in India - the Hindu India, the Moghul Empire, the British Raj, viewing it as Aryan imperialism!

The reason was quite different in Bengal. Bengali was the forerunner of a national renaissance with the acceptance and active implementation of Bengali as the Court Language and medium of education even in early nineteenth century.

Since then, language tension raises its ugly head in many different forms and in many places. The Karnataka State Government in 1982, made Kannada compulsory at primary stage even for non-Kannada speaking children which created tension. The idyllic union territory of Goa became a vortex of linguistic violence early in 1987 as the agitation to
make Konkani the official language went out of hand.

The government of Assam in 1960 made Assamese the sole official language of the state. There were riots in 1972 over the question of medium of instruction. It became an emotive issue threatening communal polarisation. The Manipur tribal students protested against the imposition of Manipuri language as the compulsory medium at all levels of education in Manipur. Linguistic chauvinism has become the order of the day. On the one hand people do not accept Hindi as the link language and on the other hand there is a pro English crusade and efforts to develop regional languages with distinct identities. Love for English seems to sweep over India several decades after independence. India witnesses an unprecedented growth in English medium primary schools in urban areas.

2.4 Cause for Language Problems

What is the root-cause of tension between the language groups and language problems?

Geographic division on linguistic grounds became a historical necessity after independence.

These language divisions invariably coincide with other divisions. Thus in Punjab, Hindus called it Hindi when Sikhs called it Punjabi. The Muslims called it Urdu while Hindus named it Hindi. The other factors that lay the
seeds of division, geographic, religious, social or otherwise are fostered by another decisive step taken by the people - that of devising a new script. Thus the language in Arabic script became Urdu and the one in Nagari became Hindi. The gap widens as time passes, triggering a process of mitosis, culminating in the development of two language entities.

Thus the separation of Punjabi through the years became marked by the introduction of Gurmukhi script. Now as recently as 1989, the Darjeeling Hill Development Council leader Subhas Gheising has given a call to change the word 'Nepali' to 'Gorkhali'. (The Statesman, Jan 31, 1989). Such calls are the starting point for language mitosis and the process becomes complete with the formation of a script that will eventually become manifest in the formation of two languages - Nepali and Gorkhali. Such a language phenomenon has become manifest before our very eyes, in the span of one generation. But there is no reason to be alarmed at the effect a seemingly innocent dividing of a script can have on people, setting in division. The same reason - dividing a script, apart from being the source of division can very well be the fountain head of unification and standardisation.

We can consider a concrete example. Nearly two hundred years ago, Malayalam was considered a dialect of Tamil. When the script was standardised to conform to the
needs of printing, two processes became evident.

1. The language got separated from Tamil and gained independent identity.
2. The three marked dialectal variations merged to produce one standard variety.

We can clearly see from the above example that script can always be a unifying force.

The tradition of dividing scripts in India has always acted as a divisive force and as such our writing tradition is both a triumph and a tragedy. All the existing Indian scripts are considered to have evolved from the Brahmi script. If such is the case, the trend was to introduce variation on the same matrix to denote phonological or phonetic deviation. The moment we use a diacritic mark to denote deviation, anyone who uses the script unconsciously becomes aware of variation. We may consider one example - The effort made to write Kurux language in the Nagari script as used for Hindi. Hindi phonology does not exhibit long short variation of /e/ and /o/ or rather, the script does not differentiate such a variation which the phonology reflected in course of time. But in Kurux such variations have phonemic significance and so to denote the short variety, a diacritic mark is introduced. Thus short अ is represented as अ and short ए as ए।
Reading, using Devanagari script for Kurux is quite easy and simple as long as one does not come across such a diacritic mark. Fluency in the reading process automatically comes to a halt the moment the eye encounters a diacritic mark that denotes variation. Unless the meaning of the mark is well propagated, an innocent reader becomes wary trying to make out the significance of the mark and in course of time abandons all attempts to read his own language. Thus the attempt of the scholars to reduce the spoken form into the written medium gets thwarted due to lack of popular support. A non-literary language continues to be non-literary when the method of adopting a script using diacritic marks is introduced.

The same problem is encountered while trying to write Kannada in Nagari script. Here, to denote the shorter variety, it is suggested that the vertical strokes above the head line can be shown upside down. Thus short ओ will be denoted as ओ and short ए will be denoted as ए. Thus for the same phonological phenomena, to use the same basic script, for two closely related languages Kannada and Kurux, sundry means are used. In modern times, when communication is possible the significance of the diacritic marks is still arbitrary. Such adaptations of script systems for non-literary languages, apart from inconveniencing the reading public, creates an instant intellectual barrier between the reader and the text and subsequently between the user of the
language and the language itself whether it is his own mother tongue or any other language. More than causing this damage to the individual intellect it does great disservice to the greatest national cause - that of national unity by always pointing its needle to the variation or deviation between languages. This compels us to focus our attention on the character, quality and usage of 'script' which has the potential of both dividing and uniting people.

2.5 India as a Linguistic Area and the Need for a Common Unified Script

The linguistic heterogeneity of India need not be the basis for all our language planning, because this is only a seeming superficial manifestation, made prominent by the heterogeneous script systems. In reality, modern Indian languages are closer to each other than they are to their parent languages. Two thousand or more years of cultural conglomeration has resulted in such an interpenetration of language and culture that one can easily isolate a common core vocabulary atleast among all the major languages. Even the phonemic systems of languages have undergone changes. The vocabulary and grammatical patterns of languages are leveled so much that in certain cases it is even difficult to separate the native and borrowed elements in languages. In India,"if one takes small spans on a scale running straight from north to south or from east to west, there would hardly be any break in communication in terms of
mutual intelligibility in the contiguous points of the scale (CIIL, 1973: vii). What prevents us from seeing the underlying unity on a deeper level is nothing but the multiplicity of scripts. Even proper names written in different scripts are unintelligible to an Indian. As one travels across India by train, even reading the place names at the stations will be a Herculean task but for them also being written in the Roman script. The havoc that is created in India is more due to the multiplicity of scripts rather than multiplicity of languages.

We are trained to see the difference between peoples and languages and not the underlying unity. We are vociferous about the Indian cultural tradition, which to a common man is an abstract entity that leaves little impact on his psyche. At emotional moments, though he may perceive this unity and make a conscious effort towards it, at other times, when he is at the ground level (where he will be most of the time) this specific perception is lost sight of and he can see only what is within his linguistic or still restricted community boundary. As long as we point to the division or diversity, we will lose sight of the unity.

At this particular point in history, we need to train our eyes to see the oneness rather than the variation. Abstract means of persuasion can never clinch the issue. Only something solid, related to day to day life can usher in such a changed perception. The most ideal solution for
this is a unified script. To make 'unified Script' an acceptable concept, we need to reinforce the fact that India is one linguistic area.

Unity in Indian languages had been observed by Caldwell (1856), Kittel and others. The most important early description of South Asian areal linguistic features was done by Bloch in 1934. His inventory of shared features provided a starting point that climaxed when Emeneanu postulated the existence of a South Asian Linguistic Area in 1956. Shapiro and Schiffman (1981: 118,9) pick out the most important features brought out by Bloch. We give below a few select items, that demonstrate multi-lingual convergence.

I. **Lexical Loan Categories**

1. Existence in Sanskrit and most of the Indian Languages of words of rhyming pairs formed by a process of reduplication and initial consonant change, considered to be of Austro Asiatic Origin.

   E.g. Pulina - Kulina
   Kosala - Tosala
   chat put

2. Dravidian loan words in Sanskrit dating as far back as Rg Veda.
E.g. Ulukhala (mortar)
Musala (pestle)

3. Lexical items in Sanskrit of Austro Asiatic Origin.

E.g. Tambula (betel)
Kadala (banana)
Bana (bamboo arrow)

4. Sharing by Santhali of lexical items with dialects of Hindi, Oriya and Bengali.

5. Adoption of numerous lexical items from Sanskrit and other Indo Aryan languages into all Dravidian languages.

II. Morphological Similarity

1. The consistent use in both Dravidian and Indo Aryan of suffixes and de-emphasizing of the use of prefixes and infixes.

2. Absence in both Dravidian and Indo Aryan of preverbs and prepositions as such.

3. The absence of dual number (originally present in Sanskrit, and lost in Middle Indic)
4. Double nominative stems of nouns, the oblique stem admitting of the force of a genitive and of being followed by words more or less emptied of their proper sense.

5. Personal pronouns having two stems that of a nominative and that of a direct and indirect object.

6. Participle varying in gender.

III. Phonological Correspondence

1. The presence in Indo Aryan, Dravidian and Munda (except Sora) of a series of retroflex consonants that contrast with dentals (a contrast not shared by Indo Aryan with other Indo European relatives.)

2. The development in Sanskrit phonological system of short [e] and [o], in addition to long forms of these vowels. This is in accordance with Dravidian and Munda patterns, both of which have short and long [e] and [o].

Such correspondences show how much Indian languages are influenced by each other. Emeneau in his 1956 article 'India as a linguistic area' added new data. He pointed out that the historical borrowing processes resulted in the languages of India becoming in many respects akin to one another. He based his concept, not merely on lexical diffusion but on phonological, syntactic, semantic and even
Morphological grounds showing that the process of culture contact results in the formation of dynamic linguistic area. The word 'dynamic' denotes that the process is an ongoing one and not just the result of past historical changes.

Since Emeneau's 'India as a Linguistic Area', other areal features are being pointed out regularly. Andronov (1964 b) brings out the simplification of consonant clusters in Indo Aryan languages in accordance with Dravidian phonological patterns, the presence of a large number of onomatopoeic terms whose formation corresponds to old Dravidian patterns, the modification of syntactic patterns to those of the Dravidian languages and chains of participles and compound verbs. Andronov also cites a number of grammatical features of Dravidian languages that may be of Indo Aryan Origin: the loss of short [e] and [o] in Brahui; the development of nasal vowels and diphthongs of Indo Aryan type in Brahui, Kurux and other languages; the development of aspirated consonants in some Dravidian languages; the loss of personal pronouns used in early Dravidian texts in many modern Dravidian languages.

Andronov suggests that convergence of this sort may in time eradicate genetic boundaries between language families, resulting in the formation of a new linguistic family (Andronov, 1964 b: 13). This theoretical conclusion that he comes to, may seem unacceptable now, but it can be realized if a greenhouse of unified script is provided to
foster its growth.

At present, we do not have any significant evidence of such a multilingual convergence. Borrowing and assimilation, sound change and adaptation are natural ongoing processes in the history of any language. Making a conscious and concerted effort to remove the distinctiveness between codes, the psychological adherence to autonomy and purity of codes will go a long way in ushering in an era of new linguistic thinking in the land and hasten the process of language convergence.

By the way regional languages are being developed as isolated globules, we find only evidence of the solidification of regional standard languages, the gap between languages becoming wider, the psychological barrier stronger and language fanaticism deeper. Rather than seeing the emergence of new pan Indian language family as Andronov predicted, we actually are observing "a continual modification of codes that in a larger number of cases, are considered autonomous by their speakers (Shapiro and Schiffman, 1981:122). With increasing divisions on linguistic grounds and increase in literacy and standardisation the social circumstances that might have led to such convergence are taken away, perhaps irrevocably, making Adronov's vision an unrealistic dream.

Area studies are going on at different places. Much is being done in proving the cohesiveness of the Indian
linguistic scene. Yet as Shapiro and Schiffman say "the continued fusion of language families, which might have gone on during the early period of Dravidian and Indo-Aryan contact is unlikely to continue" if we do not take the right step, in the right direction and at the right time. Now is the optimal time for such a step to be taken.

What was it that helped the fusion of Indo Aryan and Dravidian languages in the early Christian era and before? What was it that gave freedom to the users to freely borrow lexical and other items from one another? What was it that allowed the Dravidian and Indo Aryan scholars to sit at the same language conferences and share ideas? What was it that allowed a close link between the ancient grammatical treatises of both the language families? What was behind thousands of borrowed lexical items, long lasting phonological influences, changed morphological categories and all this at times when travel and communication were not that easy, and radio, television, air and motor travel were not found in the wildest dreams of the people.

Recorded history tells us that the writing system used in the early Christian era all over India was the same. Recently several coins in South India belonging to the Sangam period, dating between third century B.C. and third century A.D. have been discovered. "The legends on the coins are in a Tamil-Brahmi script, which proves the existence of a common script in ancient India" says R.Krishnamurthy, the President of Tamil Nadu Numismatic
There was the Indus Phonetic writing system in the land. There might have been some Greek influence when Brahmi was propagated all over India to spread Buddhist edicts by Ashoka. The same script was used by the tribes all over India, probably spread by the Brahman teachers who were the educationists of ancient India. By making the script a divine revelation, people were warned against making changes in the script. Things changed with the Moghul rule, which brought in Persian in Arabic script. The concept that script should not be changed was probably under question with a changed world view and changed religious perception. In each geographical area, scholars made attempts to write their dialects in a modified way, though based theoretically on the same Brahmi principles - but changing the graphics and adding modifications to suit their language.

The silent script changes and diversification that were going on later throughout India during the Moghul period crystallised and solidified when printing and modern education were introduced during the British times. The influence of Roman script system was felt when the number of characters was drastically reduced to suit printing needs.

So there is evidence that even upto the tenth or eleventh century, or even later, only one script was used
K.K. Shah, then governor of Tamilnadu says that until the eighteenth century, Sanskrit and Tamil were written in the Grantha Script (Shah, 1975:15). A script reform was going on all over India on a vastly greater scale than that of the reform of Ashoka's times in early nineteenth century which spread a diversified, branched out system. Hence, we see that in India, the presence of a multiplicity of scripts is a very recent phenomenon, the results of the quick efforts made by scholars of various locations in their enthusiasm to spread new learning. Is it not a historical accident that Indian scripts got diversified which has brought in an era of division on linguistic basis? To set things right, should we go back to the pre-British, pre Moghul times?

At this time in history, we cannot, need not and should not go back to times clouded through layers of history. Having the same script is not at all a new concept in India. We now propose to have a 'unified script' which, based on our writing tradition for its graphics, assimilates the qualities introduced in various geographical locations in an attempt to improve the original. It will be a unified whole, we may call it Janus faced, taking in traditional aspects and looking towards modernity.

Gwynne Dyer in one of his newspaper articles talks about a place co-inhabitated by two language groups, "the social dynamics of the place resembles those astronomical
pictures where two galaxies are passing through each other and yet none of the stars collide". He comes to the inevitable conclusion that "language, even more than politics, race, religion or wealth is the immovable obstacle that divides the human race into a multitude of solitudes". The politics of countries with more than one language is permanently plagued by linguistic quarrels. If such is the force of language on the spoken level, what will it be its force on the written level—a baffling variety in India to represent the same sounds, similar morphological and lexical categories. Even the common category, proper names are written in a mindboggling variety of ways.
India is regarded as a socio linguistic giant accommodating several linguistic and ethnic families. It is felt that "India's language problems are among the most difficult in the world to solve and among the most urgent for economic and political reasons." (Le Page, 1964 : 53) India needs language planning, which has been defined as "a political and administrative activity" (Jernudd and Das Gupta, 1971 : 196) and the organised pursuit of solutions to language problems.

The need for a common script is often felt and it is also considered the panacea for our language controversy. As making one of the languages the national language has proved to be impossible, many have pleaded to take the first step of introducing a common script, to overcome an emotional resistance. But even this cannot be attempted in the face of literature gathered up for centuries.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, to overcome printing problems, the British Government tried to introduce a uniform Roman letter scheme. In 1846 Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar advocated the use of a common script. B.G.Tilak in 1905 and Gandhiji in 1916 recommended the same. Vinoba Bhave too endorsed the suggestion. Since then, though Indian leaders, thinkers and scholars have asked for a common script, a consensus could not be reached and no acceptable step could be taken.
The Hindustan Times in 1986, ran a series of articles highlighting the problem of script in India. B.R.Kashyap (3 Oct '86), Krishan Kalra (8 Nov. '86) and others forcefully pointed out the necessity of the same. J.Radhakrishnan (23 Nov. '86) made it very clear that before we address the question of a link language, we should have started with a link script. Such suggestions could not be realised, because even here a consensus could not be reached. The Roman Lipi Parishad advocates that only the Roman Script can be the most effective one in modern times. The Nagari Lipi Parishad, headed by C.A.Menon pleads for Nagari Lipi which "by any standard of utility has been found far superior to any other script, not to say of Roman script" (The Hindustan Times, 9 Oct 1986).

While the controversy is still going on, efforts are made in various places to write the hitherto unwritten languages-tribal or dialects in newly invented scripts or reviving the extinct scripts. Chilukuri Amaravara Prasad prepared for Konkani a unique 47 alphabet script containing 14 vowels and 33 consonants (Prasad Rao, 1987). The Aicheki script has been revived for Santhali. The CIIL has prepared scripts for 85 tribal languages. These languages are all now being written in Roman, Devanagari, the ancient script and the newly invented script if any, by different people, confusing the picture on a micro level in each language area.
Vinoba Bhave had stressed that in a country like India, with its diversity of languages, there is urgent need for the people to understand each other's literature as a means of strengthening national integration, which will be made possible only through a link script which may enable the people of one language learn the other with ease.

We see the local problem of the Kurux people against the backdrop of such a scenario. The suggestion which can solve the local problem would very well solve it on the national level.

The multiplicity of scripts added on to the multiplicity of phonological patterns have made our land a virtual chaos. How can we bring order into this chaotic state of affairs. Our languages are all well classified, minutely studied and elaborately worked on, but the underlying unity, though discussed by the specialists, is still kept beyond the understanding of the common man. The interlocking of government policies and practical problems has created a situation where languages, though given incentive to be fostered, are growing so in different and distinct directions. Languages are written in widely different scripts - Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam in the South, Bengali, Gujarati, Gurmukhi, Urdu, Aicheki etc. in the North.

More and more languages come to be written adapting some script or other—mostly the regional language
script. Agarwalla (1960 : 2) had drawn guidelines to write the non-literary languages in the major Indian scripts – Roman (English), Arabic (Urdu), Devanagri, Bengali, Gurmukhi, Oriya, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Gujarati. Many agencies propagate adaptation of the Nagari script.

Our constitution makes Hindi in Nagari script as the national language. Though there are psychological problems in accepting the language and practical problems in accepting the script, we find that the latter provides the most viable starting point, if only we can remove the practical problems. For there are but two contenders for link script, the Roman and the Nagari. The Roman, if it could not be implemented at the height of the British rule, cannot be implemented now. The Nagari, considered by scholars as the most scientific script in the world may be the only other alternative. By 'the most scientific' the scholars actually mean 'the most phonetic' or 'the most accurate' in mirroring or transferring the audio to the visual medium.

Now, let us examine closely our writing tradition, actually the Sanskrit writing tradition to which the Nagari script is directly related.

All the languages in India, including Dravidian, derived their script from Brahmi. Upto the eighteenth century, Sanskrit and Tamil were written in the Grantha
The ancient Vaidika marga is based on the Sanskrit vedas and Srutis. Sruti literally means 'what is heard'. Vedas were preserved through generations by oral tradition before being rendered in written form. Among the six vedangas or accessories to the study of the vedas, the Siksa deal with general phonetics. The Pratisakhyas belonging to different Vedic schools dealt minutely with the phonological aspects of the texts. Emeneau (1955 b:19) considers that the problem of achieving correctness of pronunciation over the centuries in the face of relentlessly encroaching linguistic change seems to have been better solved by them than by any other community. They became very exact phoneticians, making a phonetic statement of Sanskrit which is responsible for the text of Rg Veda to be handed over through three millennia "with the most insignificant of changes in the text and the pronunciation of the text. The sound system or the way it is to be pronounced is actually preserved from change and erosion".

Hence our writing tradition primarily aimed at phonetic precision, and preservation from change by meticulously drawing pronunciation rules. Writing therefore sought to portray the exact way of pronouncing the sounds. Such a goal automatically ruled out possibility of any variation and incidentally chanting of Vedic hymns was limited to a select few. The language that could not allow variation in pronunciation in course of time died out from common use, becoming a pickled language-preserved in its
truest sense, while the less rigorous spoken forms grew and flourished giving rise to a variety of languages spoken by the majority of people in India.

While seeking precision of phonetic values, the system lost economy of representation. Multiplicity of letters and a variety of compound characters attempted to portray exactly the syllabic structure of the spoken word. We need to forcefully bring home such an ironic situation in the field of writing. The problems of machine application expose our fundamentally faulty view of language and its written counterpart.

The question before us is how to delink our perception of script from the traditional outlook to make it a scientific system, while at the same time preserving our roots that lead to a common source. How to make the great potential of the Indian writing tradition a kinetic realization in writing our languages. Unless we provide a sound, theoretically based scientific solution, all our suggestions will meet with failure as they have done all these years after independence.